American Dramatists Series

Captain of the Host
The Supreme Test

Florence Elise Hyde

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American Dramatists' Series

CAPTAIN OF THE HOST
THE SUPREME TEST

TWO PLAYS BY

FLORENCE ÉLISE HYDE

BOSTON: THE GORHAM PRESS
TORONTO: THE COPP CLARK CO., LIMITED

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PS3515
.A5C3
1916

DEC - 1 1916

Made in the United States of America

The Gorham Press, Boston, U. S. A.

©CLD 46100

Eng. & R. Feb. 9.17.

To the Memory of

ELOISE

My Only Sister

Dear Companion of My Girlhood

Who Died in Her Brilliant Young Prime

April Eighteen, Nineteen Hundred and Nine

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CAPTAIN OF THE HOST

A DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MAJOR CHRISTOPHER FARING,
Veteran of the Civil War
PETER TAGGART. . *Bachelor and Genial Woman Hater*
DAVID RANSOM. . . . . *Dilettante and Visionary*
JOEL LONGWORTHY. . . . . *Gold Miner*
IRENE RANSOM,
An Ardent Young Person Who Craves to Live Life
MRS. PLEIONE NEARING,
A Discreet Widow of Decided Orthodox Opinions
CECIL GORDON KEITH,
Student and Cosmopolite of Latitudinarian Ideas
NELLIE. . . . . *Irene's Maid*
STRANGE GENTLEMAN and TWO ASSISTANTS.

ACT I.—*Living room in Ransom house. Time—Evening in May.*

ACT II.—*Same as Act I. Time—Evening in October, five months later.*

ACT III.—*Parlor in Longworthy's New York Apartments. Time—Morning in March, six months later.*

There are three scenes in Act I, four scenes in Act II, eight scenes in Act III.

CAPTAIN OF THE HOST

ACT I

Living room of a stately decayed house with fireplace in one corner. The furniture is dilapidated, the carpet on the floor faded and worn. There are several chairs, a Boston rocker and a big arm chair of leather, a couch with pillows and spread with an Indian blanket, a tree for wraps, a stand on which is a lamp. In the middle is a large antique table of mahogany with heavy carved legs, claw feet, whose top, without covering, is defaced with scratches. It is littered untidily with books and magazines.

Enter Christopher Faring, heavy and portly, deliberate and humorous of speech, a major in the Civil War of 1861-'65, and Peter Taggart, a bachelor of fifty, slight and muscular of figure, spruce in his appearance. From his coat pocket protrudes a bottle.

Time—Eight o'clock of evening in May.

Scene I

Major Faring—(*To Taggart.*) It doesn't follow, because we got in, that Dave's here. Latch string always out is his motto. (*Strikes the floor heavily with his cane.*) Hey! isn't any one home? I'll bet Dave

hasn't got back from one of his hikes! (*Strikes with his cane again.*) Where's the girl? (*Listens.*)

TAGGART—Might's well make ourselves comfortable whilst we await developments. (*Takes from his breast pocket two cigars and offers one to the major.*)

MAJOR FARING—(*With a show of reluctance.*) Really, now, it's my turn, you know. I can't always be acceptin' from you, Peter.

TAGGART—Shut up! Your cigars aren't 's good as mine and you know it. (*Lights the other.*) Sit down, Major. (*They seat themselves, Major Faring in the big arm chair, Taggart in the rocker, reclining easily, his feet elevated to the table.*)

MAJOR FARING—(*Lighting his cigar.*) He's the greatest chap for trampin'! Never saw anything beat it!

TAGGART—He's of the outdoor people, you know; a lover of Nature in her various moods. (*He smokes slowly, with only occasional pulls at his cigar, his features, under the spell of the weed, assuming a look of placid and retrospective contentment.*)

MAJOR FARING—Yes, I know. Thirty miles on Monday, thirty on Tuesday to Watkins Glen an' back.

TAGGART—Keeps him strong and hardy. Plenty of fresh air and vigorous exercise make for a good old scout who can shake his fist in the face of Father Time.

MAJOR FARING—The devil it does! Couldn't do it at my age.

TAGGART—Don't pick a quarrel with your age! You've got a good lease on life yet.

MAJOR FARING—You're a kid, Peter.

TAGGART—Course, I know that. The youngest of the trio. Still, I wasn't brought up to hoofing the country over, digesting the books I had read meanwhile. I had to work when I was young. I didn't have a father to give me the advantages of a university education and then leave me a handsome house, or rather a mansion, you might call this, and money to boot. I had to hustle and do for myself or else starve.

MAJOR FARING—So did I. Dave was one of the privileged ones.

TAGGART—Aw! but, Major, what's the use of talking? You had political pull from your services to the Union. It isn't every chap can be three terms sheriff of a county.

MAJOR FARING—(*Drawling.*) It only goes to show how much the people valued my services.

TAGGART—Sure! The dear confiding peepul!

MAJOR FARING—(*Shutting his eyes.*) The grateful peepul! (*His mouth is flexible and the twist of the corners when he is particularly sportive is extremely mirth-provoking. At such times he has a slow-dawning, gradually broadening smile that is irresistible.*)

TAGGART—And so now you can afford to keep bees for the recreation of your old age. I wonder what my pastime will be? (*Relights his cigar, which has gone out.*)

MAJOR FARING—It ought to be rearin' a kid or so. A feller well situated in a pecuniary way as you are to bring 'em up right, with qualities sure to make him a good husband an' family man, ought in duty bound to feel he owed something to his country.

TAGGART—Oh, bother his country!

MAJOR FARING—(*With his irrepressible smile.*) If you had fought an' bled for it now, it would have relieved you from further sense of responsibility toward it.

TAGGART—I'm not lying awake nights worrying about my responsibility toward it.

MAJOR FARING—(*Shaking his head in mock seriousness.*) I don't know what's got into the young men now-a-days. They don't seem to feel they owe any obligations to wimmin or to the nation, for certain sure they aren't gettin' married as they did in my time.

TAGGART—Good reason. Women have become uneasy gadabouts, without any interest left for their homes, spending their time in clubs complaining about the injustice of men and asserting their rights to take over the part of men. What sort of wives do they make?

MAJOR FARING—I suppose the sex think Dave, now, he ought to get a new mother for his girl.

TAGGART—Dave! Ha, ha, ha! Do you think a spinster whose last hope had taken wings would look on Dave as a rescuer?

MAJOR FARING—Dave must be well fixed, for he never had a real job in his life save putterin' when the fit took him at settin' type in the office of The Eagle. Dave, on principle, don't believe in squanderin' his time money-grubbin'.

TAGGART—And money won't last always when it's not increased a cent, unless there's a fat heap of it.

MAJOR FARING—So I infer he must be well fixed.

TAGGART—(*Shaking his head.*) I wonder? This

place is fearfully run down at the heels. I don't believe he's ever laid a dollar out on repairs since it came to him, and the furniture is the same as in his father's time.

MAJOR FARING—In his case, that's no particular sign of a want of means. Rather it might be due to his natural carelessness an' indifference to externals, an' he's thinkin' precious little about such things. His mind is occupied with literatoor.

TAGGART—Self-improvement.

MAJOR FARING—You've said it, Peter. He's got a fund of information laid up that no other feller could gather in two lifetimes. I wish I had his likin' for literatoor. Writin' men must be a pile of comp'ny an' make a chap blamed independent of the society of every-day folks. Why, Dave will sit down here at this table sometimes of an evenin' an' read right straight through until mornin', oblivious of time, or perhaps it might chance he picks up a book in the mornin' an' then on to afternoon, not aware of a blessed thing transpirin', he's that absorbed! It's wonderful! If he had a wife bustlin' around here he wouldn't be left in peace to follow his inclinations, as I've told him more'n once. Wimmin are always flittin' about, bustin' in on your quiet at the most inopportune times, plaguin' you with some fool trifle or naggin' you about something you've left undone.

TAGGART—His wife is safe and sound down below.

MAJOR FARING—Well, she is unless her spirit wiggles out to the surface to harry him. Dave's had his experience an' I figure he's smart enough to know when he's well off.

TAGGART—Now you're talking sense, Major, and giving expression to what is your real conviction. You know you wouldn't in sober earnest advise any fellow when he is single and happy to spoil his comfort and leisure and independence by taking on one of these modern appendages.

MAJOR FARING—I should feel it my duty to preface it with a warning if I did. (*With an upward twist of his mouth.*) But suppose now, just for the sake of argument, you know, even with Dave forearmed, some hussy should manage to get her hooks in on him again!

TAGGART—(*Laughing.*) The whole sex is so confoundedly persistent and wheedling that a man has to be constantly on his guard, and even old Dave, armor proof in more ways than one, may not escape.

MAJOR FARING—Wimmin are always designin'. Still, there is no legitimate excuse for a feller who has been married; his experience ought to make him invincible against their wiles an' if he isn't a blamed idiot—just a natural plumb idiot—it will!

Enter David Ransom

(*He is sixty-five years old, tall, sinewy of build, with wisps of longish grizzled hair and dark sparkling eyes overhung by rough gray brows. He is careless to the point of slovenliness in his attire, wearing a dark blue flannel shirt with soft collar, a flowing tie, baggy pepper-and-salt trousers, and stout thick-soled walking shoes.*)

RANSOM—Well, friends, you have forestalled me this evening. Already in possession, I see.

TAGGART—Making ourselves comfortable for the usual seance. Have a cigar, Dave? (*Proffers one.*)

RANSOM—Thanks. I took a little longer stroll than I expected when I started and it was dark before I realized how late it had become. Where is Irene?

MAJOR FARING—Haven't seen her.

RANSOM—She's probably had her supper and gone out somewhere. It's immaterial. I can get my own.

Exit Ransom.

TAGGART—(*Relighting his cigar.*) I'll wager he hasn't had a crumb of dinner and doesn't even remember, the Spartan!

MAJOR FARING—Dave's soul is above mundane trifles. It's always soarin' in the empyrean.

TAGGART—Absorbed in the illimitable.

Reënter Ransom, bearing a bowl and a thick slice of bread.

RANSOM—She had left this on the kitchen table for me. (*Crumbles the bread in the bowl.*) I resemble the poet Shelley in this, friends, that I never let the question of food seriously dominate me. At the intervals when the stomach needs replenishment and civilization has therefore decreed it a custom that meals shall be served, if it chances I am where nourishment can be provided, I eat; and when not preoccupied with more important matters, with enjoyment, too. But if circumstances prevent aliment being placed before me, I am not sensibly affected by its want, often not even consciously aware of its absence. (*Stands and takes huge spoonfuls of the bread and*

milk. Sets the empty bowl on the table.) There, that ceremony is completed. Life is too crowded with things of interest and high import to devote more precious time than is absolutely essential to so purely animal a function! Gentlemen, I expect a new guest, a lately reurned citizen, here this evening, who will metamorphose this trio into a quartette. It is Nick Longworthy's son. You remember, perhaps, he has been gone for the past fifteen years, gold prospecting in the great fields of the world, and he has struck some measure of success, so I learn, in the Yukon country in Alaska. Kit, you knew Nick Longworthy?

MAJOR FARING—Knew him? I should say! Wasn't he corporal under my own command in the company I formed myself to go to the front? An' hark you, Dave, that same company was among the very first full companies that enlisted in the North! That was some distinction, what? It belonged to General Frederick Townsend's Third Regiment of New York Volunteers. The only trouble with poor old Nick was he didn't have the faculty of forgin' ahead, an' it wasn't much to be wondered at with a wife unvaryin'ly delicate an' poorly an' olive branches numberin' eight or nine. Why Teddy Roosevelt could well have recommended that feller as one who saw his duty to the world plain and done it! He was a blacksmith by trade, an' a hard-workin' faithful, steady, industrious feller, too, but brave as he was, he couldn't stand up under the strain of continual sickness an' kids comin' with the frequency of rabbits. Many of them never grew to maturity atall, takin' after their ma as they did, an' the steady expenses

of doctor's bills an' funerals kept Nick from gettin' a dollar ahead. This feller Joe was the hardiest of the outfit, formed to endure. He actually must have had gathered in his person the vigor that belonged to the entire bunch, an' being the strongest an' most capable member, he just had to turn in when he was the merest striplin' to help keep the family from the poor house. Joe worked at carriage makin'. He had a love of learnin', but scant time to spend on books. He stayed home until he was a grown man, poolin' his wages in the family pot, until the few of the kids that death spared got old enough to help themselves. When the parents died an' his sister Pleione married (she stood near in age to him—only one other between)—then, an' not till then, he went away to make his fortune. I hear he has come back for a little while in order to fix up the old homestead for his sister to live in, she havin' been left a widow. She went West, you remember, Peter, when she married.

TAGGART—I remember.

MAJOR FARING—Pleione's husband wasn't much of a hustler, hardly a fit match for a smart, efficient girl as she was, bein' a futile sort of a feller, in delicate health, an' he left her about as poor off in this world's goods as when he found her. Then you've seen Joel, Dave?

RANSOM—I've not had that pleasure. I sent him a note inviting him to become acquainted with me.

MAJOR FARING—I wonder what he's grown into. He was a big, handsome figure of a man, as I recall him, with the strength of an ox, an' a straight upright way of carryin' himself that all the drudgery put on

him couldn't bend or droop. He'd a made an imposin' soldier, with that born military air of his.

TAGGART—About how old is he by this time?

MAJOR FARING—How old is Joe? Now let me count it up. The war closed in '65, an' Nick an' Mary weren't married until some time after that. Must have been two or three years. I remember Letitia an' I carried our Juley in our arms to the weddin' an' she was two years old, an' Joe came the next year, somewhere along in June, if I recall rightly. Our Juley was the last child christened in the old Dutch Reformed Church an' it was made three years later in the Congregational, an' Joe was the first baby christened in that. (*Reminiscently.*) Let's see—our Juley is forty-sev-en—eight, forty-nine now, an' that would make Joe all of forty-six this comin' June.

RANSOM—And after a youth spent in laborious toil so unremitting as to deprive him of leisure for higher development—we will admit with some excuse, as it was entered into for the sake of those not able to sustain themselves—he is devoting the best years of his maturity to the ignoble pursuit of gold hunting. What utter folly for a man of intelligence, endowed with the powers of reason, when there is not the slightest necessity for such a course of action!

TAGGART—But, Dave, a fellow has got to work in order to get something ahead that will procure independence for his old age!

RANSOM—Nonsense! Why fetter one's thoughts to a future that may never come? Any man of average abilities can make a living without consigning his liberty to ceaseless slavery! What more does a sensible

person want than to have simply enough to sustain him whilst he inhabits this transitory body? The feverish pursuit of money for what it procures—material possessions, exaggerated luxury, convenience and comfort, that only serve to reduce life to a mere animal plane, is at a cost out of all proportion to its advantage. What are the benefits derived from such acquisitions when measured against the sacrifice demanded of everything that is of permanent, intrinsic and abiding worth?

MAJOR FARING—A chap likes to stand well in his community. Honor among his feller bein's is the very breath of many a man's nostrils, an' if he doesn't strive, how the deuce is he to achieve anything or count in others' estimation? He likes to feel he wields some influence whilst he's here—that he is somebody.

RANSOM—Local notoriety, temporal power that are forgotten as soon as he is laid in his grave—are not those pitiful aims for a man of spirit to contend for amidst the rivalries that breed jealousies, hatreds and restless discontent! (*He strides about the room.*)

We are here to become, for a brief hour, an infinitesimal element of the Great Scheme that transcends the reach of the finite intellect and imagination, to serve what ends we are powerless to discover, however curiously we may conjecture, however perseveringly we may pry into the mystery. There is a mighty veil just behind the visible interposed between us and the unknown that conceals the unknown's identity within impervious folds. What is back of that screening veil, what is contained in this colossal universe, no earthly being, grope as he will, has ever fathomed, for the Outward alone is all that we can

see; the Material alone is all that is evident, substantial and tangible. Who of us knows what the ultimate design is, if definite objective design there be any at all? Who of us knows what our petty strivings avail? Who of us knows whether our mortal achievements, taken collectively, have any value in the grand evolutionary process of which life is a fractional part, or are lost altogether in the ceaseless mutations of the physical world?

What is permanent, what really counts when measured against the stupendous aggregations of the Eternal? Then why trouble ourselves to struggle after objects of sordid gain that bring us in point of common living to the level of the brute? Life is too fleeting to squander its precious moments on trivial or meaningless quests when the mighty external world laid open to our view invites us to its contemplation. What exhilarates a man's thoughts, lifts him out of himself, as does communion with Nature? What is more majestic, more soul-inspiring than the sight of the stars glittering in the boundless spaces of the dome at night? What is more sublime than the radiance of the sunrise, or more beautiful than the freshness of a Spring morning? To strive after paltry things amidst splendors and wonders, to seek ephemeral achievements in a universe of mystery, is the part of an unthinking man ignorant of what is worth while; to enjoy whilst he may, to be exalted in mind, to keep pure in heart, is the part of an emancipated man and philosopher. You can't eat your cake and still have it, and in making your choice as to what enterprise or thing your limited time is to be devoted, you must take

into consideration the relative values of life, what in the long run is of paramount importance. To me, the comforts, the luxuries that dollars and cents can buy, public honors or fame in the world gained by slavish truckling to those in power, are purchased at too dear a price when my liberty is exchanged for them. I like to feel that I am master of my thoughts and my actions released from the trammels of convention, owing no human being ignoble service. I like to feel that I am a free spirit to come and to go as I will, with time to enrich my mind with knowledge and the best that the great thinkers of the ages have left as a heritage to mankind! (*A knock sounds on the door. Ransom goes and opens it. Joel Longworthy stands on the threshold.*)

LONGWORTHY—David Ransom?

RANSOM—Yes.

LONGWORTHY—I am Joel Longworthy. You wrote me bidding me to come to you and I am here.

RANSOM—You are welcome! Come in! (*Shakes hands.*)

(*Longworthy enters the room. He is tall, magnificently proportioned, with large, fair and regular features, blond, thick-growing and coarse hair streaked with gray. His profile, in its clear-cut nobility, bears resemblance to an ancient cameo. In his retrospective, slow-moving eyes is a glint of humor. He carries himself easily with the poise of pride and dignity. The entire man is instinct with power.*)

RANSOM—My friends, Major Faring and Peter Taggart, Mr. Longworthy. I guess you remember the Major? He's an institution here.

LONGWORTHY—One that is among my earliest recollections. I would have known you anywhere, Major, you have changed so little.

MAJOR FARING—Only grown a little older and grayer.

LONGWORTHY—Well, one could not hope to escape all traces of fifteen years. You see they have not spared me. (*Takes Major Faring's extended hand and shakes it heartily. His hands are toil-worn and calloused. He shakes hands cordially with Taggart.*)

RANSOM—Now sit down and make yourself at home, Mr. Longworthy, or shall we say Joe? It sounds more familiar and friendly. This chair is the most strongly serviceable.

LONGWORTHY—(*Seating himself in the arm chair.*) I was always known in this town as plain Joe, and it is pleasant when I come back home still to be so called. Are you still in the bee industry, Major Faring?

MAJOR FARING—I couldn't part with my bees—they afford me a heap of interest.

Longworthy—Of course they do. They were familiar to pretty nearly the whole town in the old days, I remember.

MAJOR FARING—On their quest for sweets in every neighbor's garden! Folks don't cultivate flowers as they used to an' it forces my bees to go far afield, often two an' three miles, in order to gather their honey. Late years I've got 'em in my garret an' I leave the windows open an' in the mornin' they fly out, an' every night, no matter how far the distance they travel, back they come, safe an' sound! It's wonderful,

their unerrin' sense of direction!

TAGGART—Dave here wouldn't spend his time in such an ignoble occupation as cultivating bees, even if he could derive a pretty little profit by it, as does Major.

RANSOM—I might, for the sake of recreation and as an amusement of my leisure. What I am opposed to is a man selling his liberty to any exacting occupation or business whatever form it might chance to assume.

MAJOR FARING—(*To Longworthy.*) Do you find things much changed?

TAGGART—As though any change would be perceptible in fifty years! These little towns are as slow-moving as glaciers.

RANSOM—I count it my good fortune to have found a haven in one place that is spared this insatiable American madness for improvement.

LONGWORTHY—I haven't had time to go around or look up my acquaintances. Some of the old timers who were here when I left are missing, and other residents I remember have moved away. The young fry grown up during the fifteen years of my absence are utterly unknown to me. I feel somewhat a stranger.

RANSOM—Are you intending to settle down here?

LONGWORTHY—I am without intentions for the future. I returned to look over the old place. I am laying out repairs, and making alterations in our homestead. When I left here it was sold on mortgages and now I have bought it back again. It is badly run down, but some outlay will fix it up comfortably for my sister.

MAJOR FARING—It's a fact, Joe, you always had

things pretty hard here an' scant opportunities. Yours was bad luck.

LONGWORTHY—(*With a slow smile that lights his face.*) That's as you look at it. To be sure I missed a higher education and the wider fields of usefulness it would have opened up. But when a chap finds his work so close to his hand that he is saved the trouble of going around looking for it, I call that his opportunity. And when he does that work the best he knows how, it brings a sense of real satisfaction.

RANSOM—Um, um!

TAGGART—(*Rising.*) I brought a bottle of Sherry to foster good feeling among us. Where are the glasses, Dave? Oh, I see! (*Goes to the stand and lifts a tray with wine glasses.*)

RANSOM—I don't believe they've been rinsed since last time.

TAGGART—What matter? (*Uncorks the bottle and pours the wine into the glasses. Each takes a glass.*)

MAJOR FARING—(*Raising his.*) A greetin' of welcome, Joe, an' here's to your health, wishin' your continual presence among us. (*They all touch glasses and drink.*)

MAJOR FARING—Just the same, comrades, a college education is about as valuable a settin' up in business as a father can give his son these days with competition so growin' keen. For an average ever'day man, it is almost a necessity if he's to get very far in the scrimmage, an' it wouldn't hurt a Carnegie or a Rockefeller, either. Letitia an' I did what we could in givin' our Juley a chance, fixin' her a way to earn her livin' if she ever had to come to it. Well, she married, as you

remember, Joe, nine or ten years before you went away from here. She was soon left a widow with a little boy, our Cecil, an' means so precious scant she was obliged to turn to an' help herself. We took the child off her hands, as you all recall, an' Juley went to New York, where her knowledge of typewritin' came in handy, for she got a job in a big wholesale garment establishment with remuneration enough to support herself. We gave the youngster livin' here with us, at a small cost, the fullest opportunities the public schools could afford an' after that he warranted more, for he was an uncommon quick an' studious lad, if I do say it, who shouldn't. But there we came up short against a snag, for we hadn't saved much, I always advocatin' livin' well whilst money was easy, an' consequently we were pretty much dependent on my pension. Now right here is the most utterly out of the common, most novel circumstance I'm goin' to relate you, comrades, you just ever have heard in many a day, so highfalutin' it seemed to belong legitimately to a Laura Jean Libbey Fireside Companion yarn.

That September followin' Cecil's graduation from High School in June, Juley received a letter from a firm of lawyers, Saxson, Margrave an' Company, in New York, enclosin' a check endorsed by the firm for a thousand dollars! The letter said a client interested in her son Cecil desired this money to be used to defray the boy's expenses for the college year in any American university she saw fit to select! Well, you can wager the unexpectedness of it took her breath away, an' she was curious an' incredulous enough. She went straight as her feet could carry her to the

firm an' asked some questions. The lawyers told her they weren't authorized to furnish any particulars regardin' the check, save that it was perfectly genuine, or the identity of the donor, as it was the donor's wish to remain unknown in the transaction. They weren't at liberty even to divulge if it were a man or a woman, sayin' only it was a person interested in the boy!

They assured her that each year followin' more checks would be sent. An' so they were, as regular as clock work. She chose the University of Pennsylvania. After Cecil got his B.A. degree there, another surprise was forthcomin'. A check for two thousand dollars arrived, with the word it was to defray a year's expenses abroad, an' that he was to study for a Ph.D in any German university he should elect. He's on the third year in Berlin now.

RANSOM—And you are still left without inkling as to the identity of this good genie?

MAJOR FARING—Dave, we haven't any more idea, however much we speculate, as to this unknown benefactor than we had the day the surprise was sprung! Now, comrades, I put it to you, don't you call this a regular Arabian Nights romance?

LONGWORTHY—It is certainly odd enough to pique one's interest.

TAGGART—Curiosity, you mean.

MAJOR FARING—You've said it, Peter. Why, it's more than odd—it's remarkable. Just consider a minute, comrades. Here's my grandson, a talented feller, keen for learnin' an' aspirin' to make some figure in the world as we know, but still only the merest obscure

atom on this earth crowded with people. Why should he be picked out from a million other American boys, probably not a whit less brilliant an' ambitious?

RANSOM—It's probably the work of some eccentric philanthropist who makes a business of seeking out promising young men who are handicapped in their educational ambitions through poverty.

TAGGART—That's the way it appeals to me, Dave.

MAJOR FARING—You think then this philanthropist never knew any of us?

RANSOM—Probably not. Doubtless an impersonal benevolence. He or she, (for it's just as likely a wealthy woman,) on the lookout for a worthy object of patronage, was apprised of your Cecil's record in the schools and the conditions of your own and your daughter's finances that made it out of the question for you to gratify his aspirations, and thought here's a young man possessing real merit who deserves aid, and decided at once that there was found the right case on which to expend beneficence and as a result put out the helping hand.

Enter Irene Ransom.

(*She is a handsome slip of a girl of twenty-three with a sullenly defiant air. She is of a striking gipsy type, dark, with brilliant eyes and glowing cheeks. Her clothes are shabby, the skirt of electric blue is ill-fitting, frayed at the hem, short in front, hangs unevenly at the sides and touches the floor at the back. Her hair hangs in a thick black braid to her waist*

and is loosely tied at the nape with big ribbon bows of red. She has a fondness for high colors and her V-shaped blouse of soft silk is crimson with a big black bow at the bust line.)

Scene II

Irene—(*To Major Faring and with a curt nod to the others.*) Your wife came out from Mrs. Bascomb's as I was passing by.

Major Faring—(*With affected nonchalance.*) Ah, did she?

Irene—She told me to tell you this. (*Assuming a hostile air and in high shrewish tones exaggerated to a falsetto.*) Last night she couldn't sleep a wink from the dead ache of the rheumatism in her knee, and you know very well what a nervous state she is in and how much she needs a decent night's rest so as to do the work you expect her to do days, never providing as you do a hired girl to help about a single blessed thing. If you had got the slightest consideration for her health, to say nothing of her feelings, you wouldn't need to be told to come in at a reasonable hour. Anyway she isn't going to be kept awake by you hounding out with your boon companions until midnight, and you are to come home right straight away.

Taggart—Now listen to that, will you!

Longworthy—"My wife is shrewish when I keep not hours." (*Irene turns on him a scowling glance.*)

Ransom—Irene, prithee allow me to introduce you to Mr. Joel Longworthy, who formerly lived here.

My daughter, sir.

IRENE—I've heard you spoken of many times.

LONGWORTHY—It is gratifying to know that whilst absent I am both thought and spoken of.

IRENE—(*Pointedly.*) It need not always be a cause for congratulation to a person to know he is spoken of in his absence because often what is said is far from complimentary to him.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) I fear that I am expected to infer that my reputation does not always escape unscathed from the hands of my townspeople.

IRENE—Well, they freely discuss you as everybody does discuss those who are not present to hear what they are saying, and they speculate about you too.

LONGWORTHY—Ah, I begin to realize I am of more importance than I thought if I am a subject of curiosity.

IRENE—And criticism.

LONGWORTHY—Yes, and criticism. (*Looking at her attentively.*) And can this be the little girl whom I recall the last time I saw her carrying her doll baby in her arms!

IRENE—(*With a shrug.*) Oh, that was ages ago!

LONGWORTHY—(*With a slow smile.*) Fifteen years would seem a long time to you.

MAJOR FARING—(*Rising.*) Well, comrades, I've got to decamp.

RANSOM—Don't talk about it. It's early.

TAGGART—Why, we haven't begun yet to settle down to our evening's confab. And we want to renew our acquaintance with Joe here.

MAJOR FARING—I tell you these are superior

orders, marchin' orders an' imperative. I've got to go!

TAGGART—Don't be a ninny, Kit, tied to your wife's apron strings. You aren't going to be cowed down by a woman. Stiffen your backbone. Assert your independence!

MAJOR FARING—Previous attempts have proved its uselessness.

TAGGART—(*Knitting his brows.*) Nonsense! You a major accustomed to men's obedience with a medal of honor for distinguished bravery, run around by a mere woman! Why do you allow her to be captain?

MAJOR FARING—I didn't allow her to be captain. She appointed herself to the post an' I can't remove her.

TAGGART—(*Frowning angrily and in a loud imperious voice.*) Fight it out to a finish and see who wields the authority, who is the man of the house. You are no jelly fish, Major. Then mutiny! Who are women anyway? Well enough so long as they are kept down in their place, but the very mischief when you weakly yield to them and they get dissatisfied and over-aspiring, and it's a well-known fact if you give an inch they'll take an ell.

MAJOR FARING—They're here an' a necessary evil you can't eliminate if you would. To give them their due they are a real consolation to a feller with sore throat an' aguish chills when they fetch brandy an' hot water an' flats to his feet in the middle of the night. They mean well enough an' they've got to be coaxed along an' conceded to here an' there if you manage to live with them in any sort of amity.

(*Taggart snorts.*)

MAJOR FARING—You bein' a bachelor, Peter, who never entered into intimate daily relations with them, can't appreciate the peculiar position in which a married man finds himself betwixt an' between, so to speak. (*Mournfully.*) It's better to preserve the peace even at the sacrifice of some independence. I've had experience an' I learned to resign myself to the exigencies of the situation a good many years ago. I tell you this, comrades, wimmin have a lot of ingenious means of makin' you feel their resentment when they think they haven't been treated square, or you've displeased them some way or other. Even if they don't nag you, an' most of 'em are purty efficient with the use of their tongues, they can express their injury in their manner of walkin' an' holdin' their heads. It's wonderful the variety of methods they have at their command to bring about a situation to their satisfaction. If a man possessed such inventive resources, it would be the makin' of his fortune. An' my wife is an uncommon capable woman, an' I believe competent wimmin as a general rule are inclined to take things in their own hands.

(*Irene catches up the milk bowl and spoon and with a scornful glance of defiance at the men flounces out.*)

TAGGART—(*Looking after her.*) That's a handsome girl you've got there, Dave.

MAJOR FARING—You want to get that girl married, Dave.

RANSOM—Married? Oh, there's plenty of time for that!

MAJOR FARING—(*Shaking his head.*) Don't be

too sure. You wake up one mornin' an' your child, who was playin' the last you noticed her with her doll baby, has blossomed out into girlhood so it seems, as a plant bursts into bloom over night, an' then before you can realize it her freshness has faded, exactly as the flower withers, an' she's past her prime. You want to see she has her opportunities right now to meet fellers in order to make her choice of a husband.

RANSOM—She isn't thinking of such matters.

MAJOR FARING—But you should be, Dave. It's up to you to give her her chance.

RANSOM—(*Loftily.*) I've got more important matters to occupy my attention than busying myself with matrimonial projects.

MAJOR FARING—(*Earnestly.*) My dear feller, don't talk that way. There's nothin' more important when a man assumes obligations than to discharge them conscientiously.

RANSOM—A man is bound first to the assertion of his individuality, and he owes to its development to its fullest measure his chief duty. His most sacred obligation is to that primarily whatever other obligations natural or self-imposed there may be.

MAJOR FARING—(*Sententiously.*) A man's most sacred obligation is to his family.

RANSOM—(*Coldly.*) You needn't trouble yourself to enlighten me any further on this point.

MAJOR FARING—When that girl finds herself gettin' along an' it comes over her her day has waned, she'll be grieved an' disappointed she's neglected an' passed over an' then womanlike she'll look around to

find somebody to lay the blame on. An' she'll put it on you, Dave, sure as Fate, an' complain she didn't have a fair deal. An' it'll be true, won't it, if you don't bestir yourself? I leave it to you, comrades, don't a man owe himself foremost to others when he gets married an' takes the responsibilities of children?

TAGGART—You've said it, Kit. Either that or keep out altogether.

MAJOR FARING—(*To Ransom.*) Don't take amiss what I say, old friend. I'm just warnin' you, Dave. (*Moves to the door.*)

TAGGART—Wait a minute, Kit.

RANSOM—There's no occasion for hurry, Peter.

TAGGART—I've got a sick mare in my stables. I called in the Vet. early this evening to diagnose her case and now I must go and see how she's coming.

MAJOR FARING—Peter's worst enemy couldn't lay to his door want of kindness to his horses. Good night.

Exeunt both.

SCENE III

RANSOM—(*To Longworthy.*) My friends, assuming the privilege of long familiarity which they think licenses them to concern themselves with my affairs, proffer unsolicited advice.

LONGWORTHY—Shrewd sense is not lacking in what the Major has said.

RANSOM—You really think so? This is the first time I have had the matter presented to me. It goes without saying I have never seriously contemplated

it, owing to the fact I have had so many other and more momentous concerns to occupy my attention. The paramount idea I held as regarded my daughter was to fit her to become a suitable and congenial companion to myself. To that end I have taken unwearied pains to direct the girl's studies and reading, and my care has been well rewarded, for she is remarkably well informed for a young person at her time of life, usually given over to irresponsibility and inanities. Indeed far from partaking of the trivial light-headedness characteristic of her age, I can truthfully assert she is of a serious turn of mind with a fondness for knowledge and a pronounced taste in literature. Enough of this. (*Draws his chair close to Longworthy's and leans confidentially toward him.*) Now when I wrote you the note to come here this evening, Mr. Longworthy, it was prompted by a special motive. I am at a pass in my financial affairs that might fittingly be termed a predicament. When my father died I fell heir to this house and some few securities, that altogether net a small income not adequate to defray even our modest expenses; and you can see, my dear sir, that we live in a fashion so plain and abstemious as to actually approach the primitive in its simplicity. For all that, with the passing of the years and owing to the fact that my intellectual pursuits were of a nature so absorbing as to leave me scant time to devote to employment of a gainful nature that would materially add to my income, I was necessitated to place a mortgage on this property amounting to fifteen hundred dollars. This mortgage came due the first of January and now my mortgagee will foreclose without

further delay, as I am powerless to redeem it, and have indeed for the past two years been unable to keep up my semi-annual payments of interest. It is, of course, a truism to remark that this property will be sacrificed if exposed on a forced sale. In this state of my affairs, learning that you had returned from the Yukon, and doubtless not empty-handed, my thoughts have turned to you as a possible solution of the problem, and I have even been emboldened to hope you might be induced to lend me the amount sufficient to cancel this indebtedness. I knew your father and esteemed him as a most worthy man, and whilst I was not in a position to financially aid him in his desperate straits as could and did the Major, he was never at any stage in his difficulties deprived of my moral support. Owing to that good will I entertained for him, it has not seemed presumptuous to have recourse to his son in this hour of my own perplexity.

LONGWORTHY—Any friend or well-wisher of my father has strong claims on the interest of his son.

RANSOM—Precisely as I thought you would regard it.

LONGWORTHY—Even if professed good will did not materialize into tangible acts.

RANSOM—Exactly so. You see, Mr. Longworthy, I feel that the influence I exert on this community as an abiding force for culture and progress is the greatest service that could possibly be rendered it, and should earn me immunity from the sordid enterprises of commonplace men so utterly inconsequential when measured against the things that are permanently worth while our attainment and possession. A man

who is consecrating his full powers to the intellectual and moral uplifting of the beings contained in that sphere to which he has been appointed, should be relieved from the petty cares that consume the energies of those not ordained to the highest missions. And with my sincere conviction of what my particular usefulness consists in, I have held to the position I have taken from the first. It makes not the slightest difference whether my endeavors in the superior realms are appreciated or even recognized by those whom I seek to benefit. A reformer who starts out to emancipate humanity from the thrall of ignorance and blindness must not expect either thanks or gratitude, for his services are rarely rated at their true value. Instead, he must be content with the satisfaction his conscience affords him. And a prophet is without honor in his own country.

LONGWORTHY—I will think this matter over.

RANSOM—With the probable conclusion that the account can be satisfactorily adjusted?

LONGWORTHY—I will look into the case.

RANSOM—Thank you. I am glad I could inform you I was your father's well-wisher, bearing to him feelings of unvarying good will. And these moral sentiments are not of negative, but of positive virtue, for let me assure you that the feelings we bear toward one another, whether actuated by hostility and malevolence, or benignity, have a tremendous effectiveness on the lives of our fellowmen operating as they do for or against. Mr. Longworthy, Major Faring's exhortation, or "warning" as he calls it, has turned my thoughts in a new direction. As I contemplate what he said I

am constrained to admit to my own mind the justice of his reasoning, and that his view-point is essentially sound,—that my daughter is entitled to opportunities. Yet how is it possible for me to open them to her when my means are so restricted I can give her neither social advantages nor the habiliments in which to make a fitting appearance? (*Rises and takes a turn around the room.*) The best thing for her, of course, is to get married to some sterling upright man who will take good care of her, give her an establishment and secure her from the annoyances of privations. The girl is quick-witted and adaptable and not without her share of feminine attractions, as you have seen, and she will do credit to any position in life she is called upon to assume. Her genealogical tree is indisputably excellent,—Pilgrim ancestors over in the Mayflower, great-great-grandfather on the maternal side Brigadier-General in the Revolution, grandfather Lieutenant-Colonel in the war of the Rebellion. Unfortunately our House at present has fallen into decay, owing to the commercialized spirit of the times to which I am unalterably opposed and to which I stoutly refuse either to make concession or to surrender. Taking these things into consideration, I am confronted with the question, Where am I to find my daughter a suitable mate—one compatible with her traditions and superior education? (*Pauses and regards Longworthy, who is listening in grave silence, his face noncommittal. Abruptly.*) Suppose *you* marry her?

LONGWORTHY—(*Starting violently.*) *I* marry her!

RANSOM—Yes, why not? You are an honest chap, safe for any father to trust his daughter to, born and

reared as you were in this town, of plain yet reliable parentage known to us all. Come, what do you say?

LONGWORTHY—Why! . . . er! . . .

RANSOM—You are not already married?

LONGWORTHY—No.

RANSOM—Then why not accept this proposition?

LONGWORTHY—But I know nothing of your daughter, or of women, for that matter. When I lived here I was too poor and too busy to go about, and as I never went to places where young people congregated I missed becoming acquainted with girls. And afterwards, when I left, my life was so roving and uncertain amidst such rough associations, with only adventurers for companions, I was rarely brought in contact with even questionable women, and never refined ones.

RANSOM—That doesn't militate against you, on the other hand it is in your favor you have not trifled your affections away on many affairs.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) I am too earnest for that. I have too much respect for the sex.

RANSOM—I take it, then, that you are not constitutionally averse to marriage, rather that your failure to enter upon the relation is due to lack of opportunity only.

LONGWORTHY—You might say that.

RANSOM—You are the sort of chap that a girl could unconditionally repose her confidence in. I don't know where I could find a man better fitted for the job of matrimony.

LONGWORTHY—I am no longer a young man and your daughter is a mere slip of a maid.

RANSOM—Pshaw! What matter so long as the years are not added up against her side of the account? Mere slips of maids need husbands of stable years and judgment as balance wheels. I was fifteen years the senior of that child's mother and we never found it was a serious obstacle to our happiness.

LONGWORTHY—Your daughter has lacked all experience. She should be allowed her opportunity, and it is unfair to take her at a disadvantage.

RANSOM—Nonsense!

LONGWORTHY—Would she want to be sought by an old middle-aged chap?

RANSOM—Ask her and find out.

LONGWORTHY—Such a cut-and-dried method, lacking all sentiment, of forcing myself on her wouldn't do at all, and would prejudice any girl of refined susceptibilities. It is a woman's right to be wooed and fairly won.

RANSOM—I have stated to you frankly the conditions of the case and how impossible it is for me, situated as I am, to do anything for her. She will have to go to seed if she depends on her father to give her social opportunities that would conduce to a chance at marriage such as she is entitled to look for. If you want to accept my proposition you have my fullest sanction to go ahead.

LONGWORTHY—(*Rising.*) I beg of you not to reveal the slightest inkling of this conversation to your daughter. It would be the greatest injustice to her and to me.

RANSOM—Ah! (*Smiles.*) Don't give yourself any uneasiness on that score. . . . Must you go?

(*Accompanies him to the door.*) Don't forget about that matter, as it has got to be settled directly. Come again.

LONGWORTHY—Good night.

Exit.

(*Ransom returns to the table, pours out a glassful of wine and drinks it off in one gulp. Inhales a deep breath. Slowly walks across the room, opens an inner door and passes through it.*)

Curtain.

ACT II

Scene same as Act I.

A fire is burning in the grate.

Time—Early evening of October, five months later.

The rising curtain discloses Mrs. Pleione Nearing on the floor on her knees carefully measuring the hem of the skirt she is fitting to Irene Ransom, who stands straight and motionless.

(*Mrs. Nearing is a little past forty, slight, erect, trim of figure with quick movements and turns of the head resembling a little bird. Her brown graying hair, combed demurely, is of a satin smoothness. Her entire appearance is of extreme neatness. She takes from a tiny round cushion pins, which she uses to secure the hem as she folds it to her satisfaction.*)

Scene I

Mrs. Nearing—(*In a crisp decided voice.*) You must refrain from raising your arms, for the least movement is likely to affect the hang. (*Irene folds her hands.*) And if there is a thing that offends one's eyes in a woman's get-up and just spoils her whole appearance it is a skirt that doesn't hang true. It gives her straight away an air of slovenliness. Now

turn, girlie, very slowly. (*She bends lower, resting her weight on her hands, and peers critically at the bottom of the skirt as Irene slowly revolves. With a deep-drawn sigh.*) There, that's the best we've done yet.

IRENE—It's awfully good of you to spend your time taking such pains to have me look decent. You are the first woman, Mrs. Nearing, who ever manifested any interest in me.

MRS. NEARING—Perhaps some others would if you had given them the opportunity.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) They didn't evince any desire to be given an opportunity.

MRS. NEARING—(*Carefully measuring.*) I want you to know how to make your own skirts and to do easy dressmaking, and I must say you have responded remarkably to my efforts in learning how to use your needle.

IRENE—It's such fun! I had never been shown before the slightest thing about sewing. My mother died when I was so wee and small that I was not old enough to be taught anything and I have had to dress as best I could.

MRS. NEARING—You forlorn little mouse, how you needed a mother! Well, you are coming on fine. I never saw such improvement as you have made in your dress since I took you in hand. You are very apt and quick, Irene. It was a shame for a pretty graceful figure like yours to be ruined by baggy ill-fitting skirts. (*Smooths the skirt over the hips.*) Neatness is the very first essential to a woman desiring to be attractive, and what woman doesn't want to be attrac-

tive! And cleanliness is next to godliness, you know.

IRENE—(*In a derisive voice.*) Oh, godliness!

MRS. NEARING—And when we get you all fixed up you will go to church with me next Sunday.

IRENE—*I* don't go to church.

MRS. NEARING—(*Pausing in her pinning.*) It's high time you did.

IRENE—I never was in a church.

MRS. NEARING—(*Raising her hands, and in a voice of horror.*) Oh, my dear, how awful, how barbarous to think of a girl brought up in a civilized community among Christian people to be so neglected.

IRENE—I am not neglected as concerns education, Mrs. Nearing. I am an illuminata.

MRS. NEARING—Oh, dear me, what can *that* be?

IRENE—A choicely enlightened person intellectually and spiritually. My father has taken every sort of pains to teach me. He's an eclectic and of the esoteric class, and so am I.

MRS. NEARING—Just listen to that! You poor unfortunate babe! At an age when you should only be thinking of innocently enjoying yourself, to be saturated with dry as dust learning.

IRENE—Poppie has been studying Oriental culture and religions for thirty-five years.

MRS. NEARING—(*In a voice of puzzled surprise.*) Religions? But there is only one religion, my dear.

IRENE—Oh, indeed, there are many, Mrs. Nearing, of which I can mention, Confucianism, Buddhism, Brahmanism, Taoism, Mohammedism and Judaism.

MRS. NEARING—Yet there is only one that is the genuine, the true and accepted by right-minded people.

IRENE—They all say that of theirs. Haven't you ever heard of the Ten Great Religions? I must find you that book.

MRS. NEARING—I couldn't possibly read such a blasphemous book. It would certainly bring down on me retribution from On High.

IRENE—It isn't blasphemous. It was written by a good pious man,—a Unitarian minister.

MRS. NEARING—A member of that infidel sect! Oh, you hapless girl, I entreat you don't say any more! It frightens me just to think of you harboring in your young mind such wicked ideas. If you should die to-night yours would be a lost soul.

IRENE—(*Laughing musically.*) I am not worried.

MRS. NEARING—(*In shocked tones.*) You ought to be if you had any realization of your danger.

Enter Joel Longworthy.

LONGWORTHY—What has so excited you, Pleione?

MRS. NEARING—This child has such unspeakable ideas about sacred things.

IRENE—Because I told her there are other religions in the world besides the one she happens to know about.

MRS. NEARING—Then they are false—spurious.

IRENE—(*With spirit.*) According to your orthodox opinions I suppose they are.

MRS. NEARING—This misguided child is worse than a heretic—she is a perfect heathen.

IRENE—Thank you, I am not a perfect heathen. I do my own thinking for myself.

MRS. NEARING—You are too young to do your own thinking. You should be docile and take with humility what wiser heads have laid down for you to receive.

IRENE—It is you who are an ignoramus, never looking into anything, and accepting it all on trust. If you had been born and reared in Turkey you would have been the most bigoted sort of a Mohammedan. Because you choose to shut your eyes to everything outside the ideas you have been brought up to, don't for a moment suppose there are lacking millions of people who have other beliefs that they hold sacred as you do yours.

MRS. NEARING—(*Excitedly.*) You can finish this skirt without further help from me. This is the thanks I get for trying to do you a service.

LONGWORTHY—(*Gently.*) Come, come!

(*Irene unhooks and drops the skirt to the floor. Mrs. Nearing catches it up and flings it passionately over a chair. Irene goes to the sofa and takes up her old skirt lying there and puts it on.*)

LONGWORTHY—(*In a quiet restraining voice to Mrs. Nearing, who has reached the door.*) Wait a minute, Pleione. (*Mrs. Nearing with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes turns and faces him.*) You both are entitled to your own ideas,—that is the right of every individual,—and also you both are bound to have toleration for one another's opinions and to respect each other's convictions. If you would try to exercise a little forbearance instead of passing severe judgment on views contrary to those you hold, there would not be ill-feeling because you fail to agree.

MRS. NEARING—But her ideas are more than wrong, they are monstrous!

LONGWORTHY—In your judgment yes, whilst in hers yours are unreasonably narrow and obstinate.

MRS. NEARING—Joe, I am astonished a brother of mine would countenance let alone uphold anybody in infidelism!

LONGWORTHY—I am not upholding either of you. I am simply maintaining the right of free thought and urging moderation of judgment in the matter of others' thinking.

MRS. NEARING—I shall feel it my bounden duty to turn her from the error of her ideas and convert her to the true belief.

LONGWORTHY—If your conscience assures you she is wrong in the opinions she holds, it is your privilege to try by fair means of persuasion to show her her error; but if, after you have tried all legitimate means in your power, you find your arguments do not bring her to see things in your light, then it is the part of good sense to stop. To insist further after that is to breed irritation and resentment in her when she is unable to be convinced. (*Smiling.*) Until one of you is won over, can't you declare a truce?

IRENE—(*Coming forward.*) I am ready for an armistice. (*Throws her arms around Mrs. Nearing's neck.*) I am sorry I spoke so to you. You are the only woman who ever tried to do me a kindness in all my life and honestly and truly I am grateful. (*Kisses Mrs. Nearing on both cheeks.*)

MRS. NEARING—You are not to blame, child, for your bringing up.

Enter Peter Taggart.

(*He starts back as he perceives Mrs. Nearing and then straightens himself. She also stands motionless and rigid.*)

TAGGART—(*Stiffly.*) How are you?

MRS. NEARING—(*Stiffly.*) Good evening.

TAGGART—(*More stiffly.*) This is an unexpected circumstance finding you here.

MRS. NEARING—I regret to have so unpleasantly surprised you. I should not have presumed to intrude my presence in a neighbor's house if I had thought it would prove so disconcerting to you.

LONGWORTHY—(*Mildly to Taggart.*) My sister has come to live once more among you and it is to be hoped old differences and misunderstandings can be forgotten and old friendships restored.

TAGGART—I did all that was in a man's power to explain matters and clear up the misunderstanding, and I am not suffering any qualms of conscience for failure to do my part.

MRS. NEARING—(*Tossing her head.*) I did all that any self-respecting girl could be asked to do that would conduce to bring back relations of harmony.

TAGGART—(*With withering scorn.*) You did!

MRS. NEARING—I certainly did. And if, after my honest efforts at reconciliation you chose to ignore them, the blame wasn't mine.

TAGGART—(*Stepping close to her.*) How dare you stultify yourself like that! Didn't I come the very next morning and lay the entire matter before you, tell you how it came about, and try to square myself

with you once again? And how did you treat my attempts? By listening obstinately unmoved and incredulous and ending by dismissing me from the house, giving then and there proof of the amount of justice in your composition! You call that honest efforts at reconciliation! My God! That is about as reasonable as you always were!

MRS. NEARING—(*Spunkily.*) Look here, Peter Taggart, you shall not put me in the wrong when you know all the time I made amends. No sooner had you gone from the house than a revulsion of feeling rushed over me. I was sorry for my stubbornness. I sat right down on the spur of the moment and dashed off a little note of apology, telling you how I regretted being so ungracious and unyielding, and for you to come back in the evening. It was then nearly noon and about the time for the mail to be sorted for the out-going trains and for local delivery. As I looked from the window I saw Dave Ransom swinging along the street. I ran out on the porch and inquired if he were going up-town. He said he was on his way. I then asked him if it would be too much bother for him to post my letter. He said he would be only too glad to do it, and I gave it to him and you received it by the two o'clock delivery.

TAGGART—(*In a queer strained voice.*) You say you wrote me a letter?

MRS. NEARING—Yes, I do say so.

TAGGART—You are quite sure?

MRS. NEARING—Of course I am sure. Did you ever know me to tell you a falsehood?

TAGGART—(*Slowly.*) I never received such a letter from you.

MRS. NEARING—(*Putting her hand with a bewildered gesture to her brow.*) That is very strange.

IRENE—(*With an embarrassed laugh.*) The one and only influence that can be drawn from this puzzling circumstance is that poppie forgot to post Mrs. Nearing's letter and later lost or mislaid it. He never was to be depended on to do an errand, he is so absent-minded. Once I gave him a letter to post, and he carried it five weeks around in his pocket!

(*There is a brief impressive silence charged with meaning, Taggart and Mrs. Nearing looking in dumb agony in one another's eyes.*)

MRS. NEARING—(*With an attempt at cheerfulness.*) Well, I must be going. I left my supper dishes on the table to run over here a moment to fit Irene's skirt, and now I must hurry back and get them washed and put away.

TAGGART—(*Following her to the door.*) I will walk over with you.

MRS. NEARING—You needn't trouble, Peter. It's early in the evening yet and I am no longer so young and skittish as to be scared of my shadow, or to apprehend a man is going to jump out at me from every dark corner and alleyway.

Exeunt both.

SCENE II

IRENE—(*To Longworthy.*) How strange that my father should unwittingly be the instrument that kept

those two apart all these years! If it had not been his neglect to post that letter they would in all probability have made up their quarrel.

LONGWORTHY—Supersensitive pride stood in the way of either one making any more advances.

IRENE—But it was really poppie who was the direct cause that prevented them from becoming reconciled. They were engaged?

LONGWORTHY—(*Slowly.*) Yes, they were engaged.

IRENE—Oh, what a pity that their happiness should have been allowed to become the sport of mere circumstances when the least thing going awry meant its utter extinction!

LONGWORTHY—It indeed hung on an uncertain thread!

IRENE—And she took the other man just to show him she didn't care!

LONGWORTHY—To show him she didn't care and—that she could get married.

IRENE—What was the trouble about anyway?

LONGWORTHY—It originated from a very insignificant cause, and when one comes to look at it dispassionately it is obvious the real difficulty lay in a want of tact and delicacy on the one side and an excess of jealous exaction on the other. The innocent occasion of their estrangement was a young girl who by reason of being unattractive and shy was relegated at parties almost entirely to the rôle of spectator. The poor wall-flower, discouraged from being so long overlooked, had about come to the decision she would give over social gatherings. Peter, who has a generous heart, felt sorry for this unfortunate girl and out of

chivalrous pity made up his mind that if she should appear at another dance he would pay her some attention. The evening came, he took her out on the floor a number of times and when she left the hall before the others had done dancing, accompanied her home intending, of course, to return in time to escort Pleione. You must understand he was in the habit of bringing and taking Pleione home from all the dances. Now his neglect of her, however excellent the motives actuating him in regard to the other girl, caused a great deal of comment among the young folks. She found herself in a ludicrously conspicuous position, exposed to the ridicule of her mates who rallied her merrily on being cut out by this wall-flower. Under their mocking jests she grew indignant and resentful and chose to consider that a deliberate affront had been put on her. When Peter returned from his self-imposed mission of gallantry before the dance was over, she had vanished. That is the story in a nut shell.

IRENE—And so they missed their goal! Do you know, Mr. Longworthy, I believe there is a Fate that controls us humans and determines the combination of circumstances whether auspicious or adverse that shall surround us, for some are destined always just to miss their heart's desires. You can call it luck or what you will, but the fact is demonstrated every day that certain people are fortunate, with everything they undertake sure to go well and with little resistance, with everything they want sure to come to pass and with little trouble; whilst others who strive most earnestly are doomed to failure and disappointment. They encounter so many obstacles in the path of their

undertakings that sooner or later are bound to frustrate their designs.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) What experience has confirmed so young a maid in this philosophy?

IRENE—Oh, I've noticed a lot of things right here in this small field of observation! I have seen inoffensive people condemned to suffering and poverty and misfortune on misfortune, and others all undeserving, riding high in prosperity. I know, for instance, in my own case I am not intended for happiness or success because so far not anything nice ever came my way, and when I want to effect anything something is sure to come up and prevent it being fulfilled.

LONGWORTHY—Then soon the wheel is bound to turn.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) I haven't much hope it will turn as I want it to. Shall we sit down while we talk a little? (*She goes and seats herself before the fire. Longworthy draws a chair near her.*) Now my father longs to be a writer. It is his life dream to be known in the world, to bring before it what he calls his message. He has tried and tried, but the benevolent designs he cherishes for its good aren't appreciated. Perhaps the trouble is he knows *too* much.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) Isn't that a paradox remembering that

"Ignorance is the curse of God,
Knowledge the wing wherewith we fly to heaven!"

IRENE—It sounds absurd, I know, but listen! He has been storing up wisdom all his days, his information on all subjects is vast. Whenever he has recourse to his pen in order to give expression to some views

of his own, immediately there is called to his mind an association of ideas belonging to pet writers whom he reads and admires. He makes allusion, of course, in that particular case to what has been written by famous thinkers in regard to it. After awhile his article or essay has become so long and involved and full of quotations and references to this author and that author that there is hardly left an inch of space for a genuine thought of his own in it. It is a sort of symposium. Can't you see where excessive knowledge in a writing man may become a detriment to originality?

LONGWORTHY—When the originality tends to be thin.

IRENE—(*Naïvely.*) I think, Mr. Longworthy, what ideas you have are very original, indeed.

LONGWORTHY—(*Laughing.*) You mean because they are so few.

IRENE—They are so large and honest, yes and so spontaneous. You haven't so steeped yourself in literature that you are become a repository of learned ideas.

LONGWORTHY—If I haven't steeped myself in it, it is not from a lack of love for it. I have a few books of which I am very fond. I crave learning and my want is owing to the fact that I have not had sufficient time to stock up with it. Mine is the knowledge of life rather than that of books as in your father's case.

IRENE—Two kinds of knowledge. He is reading, reading always. And reading maketh a full man. But to what avail if it does no one any good? I want the knowledge of life and I would gladly trade off all

my book learning for experiences which are real. I suppose Bacon meant by a full man one chock-full-up with ideas; but to me it means something utterly different. It means to be full of nobility and courage and daring. And what's the use of being an educated man if one's wisdom doesn't bring out those attributes? He might as well be the most illiterate. But even supposing one does have them, how is he to show their possession in a stagnant commonplace little hole like this?

LONGWORTHY—Even here sooner or later the opportunity will come.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) You think so? I never knew any one here to do anything fine and magnanimous enough to stand out of the ordinary.

LONGWORTHY—Such acts have been done here, but so quietly attention was not directed to him who did them.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) I can't think of any heroic personage here. Such places as this are not favorable to the promotion of noble deeds. Oh, I am stifled here! I am so weary of this uneventful existence I lead, each day precisely like the one before it and all of them drab. You just can't imagine! I want some interest, something worth while! I do so long to go where something will happen that is unexpected and exciting.

LONGWORTHY—(*Regarding her attentively.*) What particular place have you in mind?

IRENE—Oh, not any special place! Big live things happen in cities, don't they?

LONGWORTHY—Perhaps they are more liable to happen there. Would you like to attend some nice

seminary?

IRENE—The very thought of being cooped up in a boarding-school with a lot of lady teachers and a pack of inane girls twittering about fellows, is repellent. What have I said that you find amusing?

LONGWORTHY—Isn't it perfectly natural for girls to twitter about fellows?

IRENE—I never bother about them. I never have any occasion to bother about them.

LONGWORTHY—Some day you will. (*Ponders a few moments.*) I was thinking that some plan might be brought about by which you could live six months or more in New York and see a little life.

IRENE—(*Joyously, and clasping her hands.*) The very thing! (*Her face falls.*) What's the use of talking about it? I haven't any money, and so it's out of the question.

LONGWORTHY—As regards the financial part, don't let it trouble you, for that can be easily arranged.

IRENE—(*Knitting her brows.*) I don't see.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) But I do. Do you know it is the one great satisfaction I have in life to see boys and girls enjoying the opportunities and pleasures of which in my youth I was deprived? I have assumed the privilege of being your friend. You can call me your god-father, if you wish.

IRENE—Then I adopt you.

LONGWORTHY—It is the other way.

IRENE—(*Bending toward him.*) I wish that the destiny that presides over birth and determines who shall be our parents had made you my real and truly father.

LONGWORTHY—Why do you wish that?

IRENE—(*Earnestly.*) Because I am sure you would have been so indulgent to me and so kind and tender. Aren't big men always tender and protecting,—yes and patient because they are so slow? You would have thought of me first always and we should have been royal chums and devoted to one another. (*Lays her hand impulsively on his arm.*) I should have laid such store by you! (*Ardently.*) Oh, it would have been an ideal relationship! And you—now tell me, do you think you would have liked this prospect?

LONGWORTHY—Yes, to have loved you dearly.

IRENE—That, of course. It is a father's business to love his child.

LONGWORTHY—Do you want very much to be loved?

IRENE—In that way, you mean?

LONGWORTHY—In that way.

IRENE—Oh, don't I! My father has always been too deeply engrossed in his studies to spend much time in affection on me.

LONGWORTHY—He has spent time in teaching you.

IRENE—That yes, so that I will look up references for him and copy interminable manuscripts.

LONGWORTHY—Oh, not quite so bad as that!

IRENE—But I tell you it is true! He intends me to do that to the end of my days, and it wouldn't be so wearisome if it would ever get us anywhere, but it will not, for his manuscripts always come back! He hasn't any understanding of the things that concern and are dear to a girl, he has never taken the pains to enter into my feelings and desires, or to sympathize

with my needs, and not for a moment does he stop to think that I have any aspirations of my own. Do you mind if I tell you these confidences?

LONGWORTHY—(*Taking her hand in his.*) Tell me freely what is in your heart.

IRENE—You would pardon me turning myself inside out to you if you knew I haven't a soul to talk to who has the slightest interest in me, or whom I could trust if they did have any.

LONGWORTHY—(*Patting her hand gently.*) You can trust me.

IRENE—I am just the very loneliest girl in this whole great world, I believe, Mr. Longworthy. I have led such a solitary life from the beginning, thrown back on myself for companionship. I did not go to school as did other children, instead was with my father in the study, and I was an old young child who never played with mates of my own years. Indeed, I didn't know how to play only as instinct prompted me, and my doll was my confidante. As I grew older I was self-conscious and broodingly sensitive and shrank from others, and the life we lived so queer and secluded in this great bare shell of a house didn't tend to draw young people to me. (*Dreamily looks in the fire.*) When I look at those little sportive flames now leaping lightly up, now sinking momentarily back only to dart joyously up again, dancing sprites as they are, I begin to see beautiful pictures. And in the strong bright glow beneath these fire elves, I can fancy without much effort of the imagination many strange things. And as I muse I behold there such wonderful visions of foreign scenes,—the mighty ocean expanse with its

gorgeous sunset colors, its miraged cities, their domes and spires projected against an illusive horizon; and there arise majestic mountains, emerge deep lakes and verdant valleys, broad bosomed, tranquilly moving rivers on whose banks are stately mediæval castles, thriving cities where people speak in unfamiliar tongues. As I gaze I see a future not drab and barren, but gay and splendid and crowded with interests, with myself moving in it, a lady in a lovely gown in a fine house with servants to wait upon me, an automobile and money—enough money not to take thought of the cost of anything I need or desire, but to be free of scrimpings and savings and self-denials for evermore! Do you know I have the idea if this could be more than a dream, a lovely anticipation, it would seem to me just as though I had been born over again an entirely different person, to live a new, a full, a glorious life! Oh, Mr. Longworthy, if it were not for these visions which divert the monotonous hours, these reveries which give me the solace of hope, I should die of sheer despair! (*Breaks into a quick sob.*)

LONGWORTHY—(*Feelingly.*) You so yearn to see the world?

IRENE—To travel, to experience the wonder of it, to know what it holds. But my visions are too good to be true!

LONGWORTHY—Extraordinary things sometimes do happen.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) Not to me. And some day the firelight which is company for me and soothes and entertains me, will only make me sad and moody.

LONGWORTHY—(*Patting her hand.*) A little pessimist done with the hopes of life at twenty. One day Prince Charming will emerge from the glow and everything will be transformed.

IRENE—(*Contemptuously.*) Oh, Prince Charming! I told you I am not bothering about fellows.

LONGWORTHY—(*Lightly.*) That's because you never had any.

IRENE—(*Seriously.*) You have guessed the truth and when I say I am not bothering it is because I don't have the chance to bother. I had neither brothers nor cousins and so am without any idea of what sort of creatures young men are, though I confess I am curious to know. But I am sure they wouldn't care to know what a girl of my sort is like.

LONGWORTHY—You don't want to get that idea in your little head.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) The worst of it is I can't get it out!

(*A series of loud insistent knocks are heard on the door.*)

Enter Major Faring with rolling gait partially supporting himself with his heavy cane.

SCENE III

MAJOR FARING—(*In hearty cheerful tones.*) Where's Dave, this evening?

IRENE—Poppie went out right after supper to the reading-room. He said he would only be gone a few minutes.

MAJOR FARING—I'll wait. He expects me.

(*Takes off his coat and hangs it with his hat on the tree.*) Good evening, Joe. Well, you two look snug an' cozy enough sittin' together there by the fireside. It's a pity to interrupt such comfort. Goin' to join us to-night?

LONGWORTHY—I thought I would.

MAJOR FARING—(*Slapping his thigh.*) That's the sensible decision, my boy. Don't deny yourself the advantages an' pleasure of converse with your friends. Man is innately a social animal an' you're by nature no recluse. Be one among us!

Reënter Peter Taggart with Ransom.

MAJOR FARING—(*Calling out heartily.*) Hello, comrades! I was half afraid Dave would get absorbed in some magazine an' be oblivious we existed, but here we are all together an' Irene here entertainin' a young man. It's her first caller if I don't miss my reckonin'! (*Ransom turns a sharp glance upon Longworthy.*)

IRENE—(*Pointedly.*) If it is, it's because I never have a chance to entertain a caller for myself with the house always occupied with its regular habitués.

MAJOR FARING—What, what! You don't mean its regular bores?

Exit Irene with a disdainful toss of the head.

TAGGART—(*Drawing from his breast pocket half a dozen cigars.*) Here, Major.

MAJOR FARING—(*With a show of reluctance.*) Really, now, it's my turn, you know. I can't always be acceptin' from you, Peter.

TAGGART—(*Passing the cigars around.*) Nonsense! You know my brand is better than yours.

LONGWORTHY—The treat is on me this time. (*Goes to the tree and takes from his coat pocket a bottle. Holds it up before them.*)

TAGGART—(*Reading the label.*) Alfonso & Hipoleto Sancho. Vinos De Jerez. Amontillado Don Quixote. Sherry! By George, imported Spanish dry! We're highly favored, boys. (*Smacks his lips.*) (*Longworthy produces a small corkscrew and removes the cork and pours the wine in glasses. They draw up chairs to the table.*)

MAJOR FARING—(*Sipping his wine with the lingering luxurious delight of an epicure.*) This is comfy, what? I tell you, comrades, when I come to measure the things from which I derive most satisfaction, there is not anything in the world to me that can compare in downright enjoyment to these nightly séances of ours. I look forward to 'em as an oasis in the desert of daily life. They fill bright shinin' hours out of the monotonous vacant ones. An' when a chap after testin' out his capabilities an' learnin' about what he has to look for from the world, has reached middle life or old age, what particular hold has he left on things here below save his friends an' the interest he obtains from their society? If I had to be shut out from intercourse here an' be denied the fellership of you chaps, I should consider myself instead of the most privileged, the most sorely deprived of men. Here at these sessions we can discuss all friendly an' nice, secure from danger of trouble growin' out of it, all the important happenin's on the round earth, an'

arrange its affairs as we think fittin' an' proper an' afford to pity the steerers at the helm for not knowin' enough to guide the ship of state right. Moreover we can criticize to our hearts' content the doin's of those bosses of our own feedin' steady at the administration crib at Washington, for the right to judge even the highest an' speak plain out our thoughts on every subject pertainin' to our governin' are among the fundamental prerogatives of this constitution. An', my God, how precious it is an' what comfort we get lambastin' those set above us in authority! I tell you, comrades, these meetin's of ours are not only a high source of instruction an' profit, but of enjoyment the most convivial, an' I appreciate 'em to the fullest extent.

TAGGART—(*Slyly.*) And no uneasiness experienced about overstaying time. How about the Captain, tonight?

MAJOR FARING—My wife? (*Sinking his voice confidentially.*) Say, what do you think, she's gone to help friend Mrs. Oldboys nurse her husband, who was taken down this week with grip, an' I am left alone to batch it for the time bein'. Come, what do you know about that?

TAGGART—How do you like being deserted?

MAJOR FARING—Well, there are compensations. It's a change, anyway. Dave an' Peter, you two old Mavericks, you don't properly appreciate the liberty you enjoy from bein' unclaimed, or half realize the drawbacks you are free from through your escape from double harness.

TAGGART—Oh, I don't know! Marriage isn't the

worst lot that could befall a chap.

MAJOR FARING—(*In simulated astonishment.*) What, a confirmed bachelor an' woman-hater makes an admission like that!

TAGGART—Marriage brings its own compensations. It saves a chap from feeling lonely and forlorn as he is getting on in years and gives him all sorts of lively interests.

MAJOR FARING—Do my ears serve me right?

TAGGART—As you once said here, a wife is a mighty useful article to have around the house when a chap has sore throat and aguish chills chasing over him.

MAJOR FARING—It's true as God's gospel, Peter. Whatever her faults of austerity an' overdiscipline, when it comes right down to hardtack my Letitia is the most loyal an' devoted soul a feller could ask for. Her intentions are well meant an' I've no complaint as regards 'em. Joe, haven't you any contribution to make on this here wife question?

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) I fear I am not properly qualified to speak on so complicated a question.

MAJOR FARING—Of course you lack experience, still you must have a theory of wimmin an' wives in general as Peter does. Joe, you are about as reticent an' close-mouthed as Honest Abe an' that man was a Sphinx for knowin' enough to keep his own counsel when it was to the best advantage of those with whose interests he was intrusted. I have an idea that, like him, you do a lot of thinkin' on various subjects without much expressin' on it. You must have had in your wanderin's around the world experiences worth relatin'. Come, won't you tell us about some of your

thrillin' hair-breadth escapes?

LONGWORTHY—I would willingly if I had ever had any hair-breadth escapes.

MAJOR FARING—That beats anything I have heard. How did you miss 'em?

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) They didn't come my way, that's all.

MAJOR FARING—(*Incredulously.*) Do you mean to tell me a feller livin' among all kinds of rough characters with desperadoes sprinkled in for good measure, didn't some time or other come in for a knock down row or a stiletto thrust? (*Longworthy shakes his head.*)

MAJOR FARING—But how did you escape such contingencies?

LONGWORTHY—By not being afraid.

TAGGART—You were so armed to the teeth, I suppose, that *they* stood in healthy fear of you.

LONGWORTHY—(*Taking out a small white-handled knife from his pocket and exhibiting it to Taggart.*) I never had at any time a weapon on my person during those fifteen years of roving and living in camps consorting with the rudest elements of society, larger than this knife.

MAJOR FARING—Well I'll be jiggered! (*Fills his glass from the bottle.*)

TAGGART—(*Curiously.*) This becomes interesting. If unarmed, how did you manage, then, to inspire such awe as to be immune at all times from the danger common to every man in your peculiar circumstances?

LONGWORTHY—(*Calmly.*) By not being afraid.

TAGGART—Then you either intimidated them in

some other manner, or hypnotized them.

LONGWORTHY—I did neither.

MAJOR FARING—But, my dear feller, then how in the name of common sense did you control 'em an' save yourself from bein' stuck to the death?

LONGWORTHY—In the gravest crisis I never lost my sense of absolute fearlessness, my faith in my own ability to resist danger. By not forfeiting my self-command I was therefore enabled to control the situation, however crucial it might be. My power consisted simply in that alone.

TAGGART—You depended on your great physique, your mighty strength of arm, to properly inspire them with respect.

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) Though I should have used it in emergency, I did not have occasion.

TAGGART—This is very remarkable.

RANSOM—His weapon was purely psychic, a subduing of the passions of those less disciplined over whom his tranquil restrained mind gained the mastery.

TAGGART—Now that we are on this subject it is not out of place to tell you, Mr. Longworthy, from the first meeting with you since your return amongst us here, I have been singularly impressed with something strangely out of the ordinary emanating from your presence, that something as near as I can come to describing what is so queer and bafflingly indefinable, of the nature of a pervasive influence that dwells in you and goes out from you, subtle, invisible but absolutely compelling! At the same time I have been cudgeling my brains to puzzle out what this peculiarity of yours really consisted in and why this curious

power of yours over me, you have so infused in me faith in your wonderful strength and ability to dominate any circumstance that might on the spur of the moment unexpectedly arise, that I am pretty fairly convinced whatever untoward thing might happen if I were in your company, I should not be bereft of my self-possession. Friends, how am I to make you see what I feel and am groping to express? Well, let us suppose Joe and I were strolling along the humdrum streets of this town and the inhabitants all at once, it being election time, or some other cataclysmic occasion, took leave of their bovine serenity and ran amuck, flying at one another's throats, attacking everything and everybody—in short, turning themselves into a mob of frantic madmen—and we two found ourselves in the thick of this fray. Now, I'll hazard dollars to doughnuts, Joe Longworthy would either quell that riot or make his way out of it without getting his head broke!

MAJOR FARING—Are you flattered, Joe, at bein' deemed a feller possessed of a special, a preternatural faculty?

LONGWORTHY—(*Smiling.*) Not unduly, because I believe it is within the power of every man who tries to inspire such confidence and to exercise such authority of restraint.

TAGGART—It is within the power of about one man in ten thousand men.

LONGWORTHY—You underestimate the average will power of men.

MAJOR FARING—I have said all along, Joe would have made a Number One-A soldier.

RANSOM—He can have his opportunity now by offering himself to the Teutons.

TAGGART—You mean by offering himself to those whose traditions, mother speech and literature he shares, and who are forced to this struggle for the preservation of their own national integrity and the rights of less sovereign peoples to exist!

MAJOR FARING—Forced to this struggle for the preservation of human rights an' human liberties! When, back in the sixties, we Northern men poured out our blood like water in order to save the Union from disintegration, we thought ours a tremendous conflict, for the rebels, upborne by a sense of injustice, were brave as lions, full of darin' an' with a dogged tenacity of purpose that was downed only by the overwhelmin' odds of our troops an' unlimited financial resources an' food, an' the cuttin' off of their supplies an' trade by the biggest blockade the world ever saw! With antagonists of such a temper we gained our cause by the exertion of our utmost efforts an' at a sacrifice of limb an' life truly terrible. But what was that conflict to this colossal affair with millions of men engaged on all sides an' its horrors increased tenfold by all sorts of modern mechanisms an' devilish contrivances that destroy property an' mutilate an' put men out of business the rest of their days when they don't exterminate 'em altogether! I tell you, comrades, it staggers the imagination.

RANSOM—It's the most stupendous spectacle the world, ancient or modern, has ever been treated to, and I doubt if its like will be exhibited again.

LONGWORTHY—A consummation devoutly to be

wished.

MAJOR FARING—It's as wicked a war as was ever hatched up through the self-interest of those who instigated it an' who are directly responsible for untold sufferin' an' misfortune that will be visited on more than one generation.

RANSOM—It's been on the way a long time.

MAJOR FARING—(*Significantly.*) There I can agree with you, Dave. If it did come to the rest of the world like a bolt from the blue, it was brewin' some forty years odd,—in short since the last big upsettin' of Europe in 1870!

TAGGART—It's a great capitalistic contest.

RANSOM—It was inevitable.

MAJOR FARING—An' why? Because of the jealousy of one aggressive domineerin' power evolvin' too fast for its own good, against a neighbor whose supremacy has not been of one century's duration only, an' who has been absolute mistress of the seas since the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588! This upstart power sprung into the full growth of an empire like a mushroom over night, so to speak, couldn't rest contented because it was obsessed by the idea it must push itself in the preëminent place occupied by its neighbor, an' that effectuated, play the Napoleon game over again!

TAGGART—One trouble is, there isn't enough land in Europe to satisfy the greed of the Big Five.

LONGWORTHY—To my thinking, the ordinary reasons brought forth in explanation are superficial, and the underlying cause is something entirely different. It is a war waged to determine which nation's ideals shall survive; which intellectual, moral and political

pattern shall persist; in short, whether Teutonism or Anglo-Saxonism is to prevail.

TAGGART—I hadn't considered it in that light.

RANSOM—It will be the survival of the fittest.

LONGWORTHY—In the long run, yes.

RANSOM—And the fittest is the power that has been demonstrating to the world right along its claim to ascendancy by virtue of superior excellencies in its every line of endeavor, and in this struggle, thus far, a matchless virility.

TAGGART—Not virility, but preparedness!

LONGWORTHY—(*Mildly.*) The conclusion is not yet.

RANSOM—It is foreshadowed.

MAJOR FARING—You're committed to the side of military domination—you're Krupp-Kaiser, Dave!

RANSOM—(*Stiffly.*) I beg your pardon. I'm strictly neutral. (*A burst of Homeric laughter.*)

TAGGART—Nonsense, Dave! Why aren't you honest enough to come out in your true colors?

MAJOR FARING—(*Mockingly.*) Kool-toor!

RANSOM—You can sneer, Kit; it will prevail.

MAJOR FARING—Not so, for you can't make a thing permanently hold that is imposed on you against your will an' your strongest convictions, I don't care how big the power of coercion behind it. There is a bigger power that moves men than the Krupp-Kaiser force, with all its devices an' appliances, an' that is the power which works invisibly in the brains an' hearts of men until it manifests itself at last in their ideals an' their principles. An' when those ideals an' principles make for progress an' civilization on this

planet, you aren't goin' to easily uproot 'em in order to put in their places those that are outworn an' retrogressive. I make no secret of where I stand. I am proud to range myself on the side that is aidin' the world to move in its steady course toward that perfection in condition of the human race that will be attained only through individual freedom an' enlightenment. What's gained by teeterin' around an' pretendin' one is something he isn't? There isn't a person worthy of the name of an independent thinkin' man of sense an' conscience who hasn't his judgment formed in this matter an' whose sympathies aren't ranged on one side or the other. The only thing that can be asked of us fellers over here is to remain neutral in our acts.

RANSOM—(*Coldly.*) No man is licensed to tell me in my own house, against my protestations, I am unneutral.

TAGGART—But, Dave, in any argument that comes up, we can't help but notice you throw the weight of your reasoning on the German side. And so why not be frank about it?

MAJOR FARING—(*Bitterly.*) He's ashamed, I suppose, to come right out an' boldly uphold a nation whose overgrown army has been allowed to ruthlessly violate an unoffendin', helpless little country, kill its citizens who dared resist the invasion, run families out in the streets, destroy their homes an' make 'em wanderers on the face of the earth!

TAGGART—Aw, never mind, Major! You are an old warrior, and your enthusiastic championship of the wronged makes you too strongly partisan.

RANSOM—I ask you to take that back, Kit.

MAJOR FARING—(*Belligerently.*) I won't take it back when it's God's truth! An' I must say right here whilst we are on the subject, I am surprised at the attitude you take in this matter, Dave. For a feller brought up in a land of the free, amidst democratic institutions, to put a slap in the face of progress by endorsin' a country whose political ideals are three hundred years behind the times, shows atavism in his nature!

RANSOM—This rubbish of democracy—what have we made by it?

MAJOR FARING—What haven't we? We enjoy opportunities at every turn in the road an' are favored every way to rise in the world. What show would you or I have had over there to get an education, to get into business or politics, or make a decent livin'? The poorest, most obscure of us feels he is some consequence; that he counts just as much in our government as the richest, an' that helps give a feller confidence an' self-respect an' puts him on his mettle if he's got anything in him atall, to make the most of himself. Look here, Dave, you can't deny this experiment of ours, the grandest ever tried in history, has worked out amazin'ly well, an' the thought back of it is the most darin' an' comprehensive ever born out of the brain of man!

RANSOM—Oh, prating cant!

MAJOR FARING—Well, all I've got to say is a feller whose forbears left him a heritage of splendid liberty an' patriotism as glorious as ours, won through blood an' self-sacrifice, who will go back on the principles to

which he is born, is no good American!

RANSOM—(*Springing to his feet.*) You dare cast a slur on my Americanism! I will teach you in my house to talk like that! (*Strikes him full in the face a brutal blow.*)

MAJOR FARING—(*With a gasping cry.*) Are you plumb crazy, Dave Ransom? (*Reels back.*)

TAGGART—(*Overturning his chair as he leaps forward and in a ringing voice.*) You coward, you contemptible cur! Are you without any sense of decency? What do you mean by striking an old man?

RANSOM—(*Contemptuously.*) You swelling little game-cock! What are you going to do about it?

TAGGART—(*Breathing hard.*) I will teach you not to lay your hands on him, you damned brute! (*Doubles his fists and rushes upon Ransom. Chairs are overturned, glasses thrown from the table in the scuffle. They grapple furiously. Longworthy interposes himself between them and parts them. His form expands and rises to its full majestic proportions. His deep eyes glow. Breathing hard, they pause and are held by his compelling gaze. There is a silence so charged with suspense that the seconds pulsate with it; then he speaks in an imperious voice.*)

LONGWORTHY—I entreat you to act as sane beings. This devastating war, the greatest calamity in the history of man, is three thousand miles distant, and not anything we as private individuals think about it or say about it can have power to change it in the slightest degree. Shall we, then, add to its tragedy by allowing its poison to bite into our lives, by letting the wear of it strain and snap asunder the bonds of

old and tried relations, by letting oppositions and resentments and hatreds engendered by it forfeit the precious ties of years of familiar fellowship? I ask you, is it worth while? Then let us look at it from a reasonable standpoint. Retain our own private opinions as to the right of the side we have espoused as we must and will, but meanwhile be just to others whose opposite point of view has led to a contrary conviction, and harass them not by forcing unwelcome arguments upon them.

Now, friends and neighbors, try and make this up. Mr. Ransom will, I am sure, be only too ready to apologize to Major Faring for the insult he offered him in the rush of sudden anger, and Major Faring on his side will promise not to affront him again in so personal a manner.

MAJOR FARING—(*Advancing.*) I said more than I was called on to say, or had warrant to say, an' I admit I was aggravatin'.

RANSOM—(*Drawing back and addressing himself to Longworthy slowly and distinctly.*) Yours is an erroneous calculation, Mr. Longworthy. I have no apology to make to Major Faring. For the act I did, I offer him no reparation.

TAGGART—(*In a voice tremulous with rage.*) Then we shake the dust of this house off our feet, Kit, where hospitality is outraged and age subjected to the indignity of violence. (*Goes to the tree, takes off it Major Faring's coat and hat, which he gives to him. Then takes up his own hat. Goes to the door, opens and holds it wide, in silence, whilst Major Faring passes through. Closes it after himself. Longworthy*

for a few moments remains in a motionless attitude, then steps to the tree to get his own coat. As he does so, the inner door is burst open and Irene, flushed and laboring under violent agitation, enters.)

Scene IV

Irene—(*Pouring out a torrent of words, features working.*) I was witness of the entire scene! Aroused by the Major's voice, high in argumentation, I came to the door to listen. I saw that old man brutally struck! Whatever the provocation, it was the act of a cad, a mean coward, and I despise him who did it! However much he may vaunt himself on his scholarship and his superiority to common people, he is cruel and pitiless at heart. The learning, the wisdom, and the culture of the savant won't make a gentleman if a man's nature is innately base, and for all his veneer, this man is at bottom as coarse and plebeian as the most utter Philistine he scorns. He would not hesitate a minute to sacrifice me to his self-interest, and already he has devoted my youth to his accommodation. He is an unnatural father, without common feeling for me, concerned only with his own advantage and leisure. I have learned him through and through during the years I have been cooped up here, deprived of any chance other girls have. He has made this scholarship an excuse to lounge around and get out of earning a man's livelihood, and if we hadn't had a little money from his family we should have gone long ago to the county house! Why did he take the

responsibility of a father, if he didn't intend to do his part? Did he ever at any time give a thought to my claims, to my rights? Oh, no! he had none to spare outside his selfish pursuits and convenience!

RANSOM—(*His face contorting and a dark purple flush overspreading it.*) Have you taken entire leave of your senses, that you run on like a mad woman?

IRENE—(*With growing excitement.*) I am telling you what has been gathering in my mind for years, and it is God's truth! From the days when I first became old enough to judge and estimate, I have always known you to be an intellectual Sybarite, a quitter, and I couldn't feel respect for you! And now my last remnant of liking for you has died away that I know you for a mean coward taking advantage of age! (*Bursts into a convulsion of sobs.*)

RANSOM—(*In a voice shaken by anger.*) Ungrateful, unfilial minx, to insult and revile me in the presence of an outsider! Say another word, you shameless termagant, and I will turn you neck and heels out of my doors!

IRENE—(*Swaying back and forth.*) Do you think I am afraid of your threats? Do you think it is so attractive here with so much to offer a young girl in the way of privilege and indulgence that she wants to stay on and on? I don't know of any place on earth more empty and forlorn than home! (*Laughs hysterically.*)

RANSOM—You jade! (*Makes a step toward her. Longworthy, with an imperious gesture, raises his hand.*)

IRENE—(*To Longworthy.*) Take me away! I

tell you I won't stay under this roof another night; do you hear?

LONGWORTHY—(*Soothingly.*) Yes, I will take you to my sister, who will be so glad to receive you and who will treat you as though you were her own daughter.

RANSOM—Take her away and keep her away! *I* can get along very well without her. My God, that I have nourished such a viper to sting me!

IRENE—(*Sobbing.*) Yes, I have neither home nor father.

RANSOM—(*With deepest resentment.*) You have spoken truly. The words you have said to-night can never be unsaid, and expressing as they do your contempt of the one you should revere, your undutifulness, your disloyalty, have debarred you from my fostering care and protection. I have no further interest in you and I am utterly indifferent as to what fate befalls you. Go with this man, wherever he chooses to take you; it is immaterial to me. All that I want is that you betake yourself hence!

IRENE—(*With an affrighted glance around.*) Don't let him come at me! He hates me for what I have said and he will do me harm! He has a cruel temper. If he gets me he will do me harm! (*Throws herself upon Longworthy. Clings to his neck with both arms.*) Take me away where I shall be safe! Don't let anything hurt me! I tell you——

LONGWORTHY—(*Smoothing her hair.*) There, there! Nothing will hurt you. (*Gently.*) Come! (*He leads her to the tree and puts on her coat.*)

IRENE—(*In a wondering voice.*) Where are we

going?

LONGWORTHY—(*Soothingly.*) To my sister, who will put you in a soft, comfortable bed where you will sleep without fear.

IRENE—Oh, yes! I forgot. What is it we have been saying? What has been the cause of this scene? Why was it so violent? (*Looks at him with bewildered questioning gaze.*) Why was I so passionate? (*Puts her hand to her brow.*) Is it a dream?

(*Ransom emits a deep groan, sways uncertainly, and plunges heavily to the floor. Longworthy turns quickly and rushes to him and, bending on his knees, raises his head. Ransom's eyes are wide open and staring, and he breathes stertorously.*)

IRENE—(*In a faint voice.*) What is it? What has happened? Oh, my God, what has happened?

LONGWORTHY—(*Quietly.*) Dear child, your father is over-fatigued. Go now to my sister and tell her to send a doctor. Don't be alarmed, little one. It will come right.

Exit Irene.

(*Longworthy, with an effort, raises Ransom and carries him to the sofa. Unbuttons his shirt-collar. Ransom breathes stertorously.*)

Curtain

ACT III

Parlor in Longworthy's New York Apartments. It is handsomely furnished in mahogany, with chairs and rockers, a round table, with well-bound books, a square table, with a vase, a low couch, covered with a spread and containing fancy pillows, a high mantel on which are a few ornaments. A Royal Wilton of soft blended colors is on the floor.

TIME—*March morning, six months later.*

Mrs. Nearing is disclosed, wearing a morning house gown of dark blue chambray with low turned-down collar of white lawn that displays her plump neck, and elbow-length sleeves finished with soft cuffs of white lawn. Her hair is covered with a coquettish little lace cap with tiny bows on each side of blue ribbon caught with rosebuds. With duster in hand, she is carefully wiping off the furniture.

SCENE I

MRS. NEARING—(*Ruminatively.*) I've already made the beds, slicked up the rooms and given Nellie her orders for luncheon, and after I have finished this dusting I mustn't forget that mirror in the dining-room sideboard. Last night at dinner I noticed a

smudge on it and I charged my mind to wash it off the first thing in the morning. (*Sighs, then with care gathers up the books lying on the round table, wipes off the mahogany, and then the books, replacing them one by one.*)

NELLIE (*The smart maid, entering.*)—A gentleman for you, ma'am.

MRS. NEARING—For me? You mean Mrs. Longworthy, Nellie.

NELLIE—No; it was Mrs. Pleione Nearing, ma'am. *Exit Nellie.*

MRS. NEARING—Who in this great city could ask for me? (*Swings around and perceives Peter Taggart.*)

TAGGART—(*Coming forward with outstretched hand.*) Well, Pleione, busy as usual, of course. I wonder when you get to heaven if you'd be happy without finding something to do there in the line of work. Perhaps the angels will be accommodating enough, knowing your longing to always be occupied with some task, to let you burnish up their golden harps.

MRS. NEARING—(*With horror.*) Why, Peter, how irreverent!

TAGGART—Well, I always was an irreverent dog and I never made any bones about it.

MRS. NEARING—(*Reprovingly.*) You should try and cultivate a different spirit with more respect for sacred things. I don't believe you realize, Peter, how downright profane such speeches sound! They quite shock me.

TAGGART—I'm sorry to do that. It would be an

act of charity on your part to reclaim me.

MRS. NEARING—A difficult undertaking, when you are incorrigible.

TAGGART—Isn't it worth while to try and pluck me a brand from the burning? Why don't you let Mrs. do that dusting?

MRS. NEARING—Mrs.! (*Laughs lightly.*) If I left it to her, the dust would accumulate thick enough to write your name all over the furniture. (*Confidentially.*) The fact is, just between you and me and the gate-post, there isn't much dependence on her, Peter. For the first few weeks after her father died she was quite subdued, tamed, in fact, and all that was womanly in her came to the surface. She turned her attention to the interests that usually characterize our sex and evinced a willingness to learn how to do things, and though she was a perfect little ignoramus, she was quick enough to catch on, as the saying is, and really seemed to find enjoyment in trying, and after Joel married her a month later, she asked me to come here with them and teach her all about housekeeping. But very soon her ardor cooled, her attention being taken up with the city in which she became so engrossed with the going about that she had neither time nor desire for any more domestic tasks. Major Faring's grandson, Cecil Gordon Keith, you know, who returned from Germany when the war broke out, is here in New York and made our acquaintance very soon, and he offered to escort her out afternoons and evenings whenever she wished. He comes so often that one might say he just about lives here, and the excitement of it all, the rushing hither and thither,

the dissipations and the late hours, have turned her head and made her quite giddy.

TAGGART—She is young, and this is her first fling, and naturally enough she is carried away with it. Remember, it is the age of enthusiasms with her which we also once knew. After she gets her fill she will settle down.

MRS. NEARING—I sincerely hope so. My brother sanctions it—indeed, says he brought her here for the express purpose that she might see and experience life. Nevertheless, it doesn't seem right that a person with an immortal soul should fritter away her precious hours on such trivialities. (*Compressing her lips.*) I never did approve of married women exposing themselves to the temptations that come from being too much in the society of men who are not their husbands.

TAGGART—Your blood is Puritan, all right, Pleione.

MRS. NEARING—(*Tossing her head.*) I hope there is still enough of the Puritan strain left in the womanhood of our country to enable us to bear ourselves with dignity and self-respect. And what makes it more complicated in this case is that the girl is primitive as a savage and indeed one might say without the slightest idea of what constitutes the proprieties.

TAGGART—(*Smiling.*) She lacks the admirable prudence and circumspection for which her sister-in-law is noted. Do you ever make an effort to show her the error of her ways?

MRS. NEARING—I feel it my duty now and then to warn her.

TAGGART—And what does she say?

MRS. NEARING—She laughs and throws her arms around my neck and says she can't live like a nun in such a fascinating city as this, and that I mustn't be old-fashioned and severe because she is young and loves pleasure. But I am not here to complain of her, Peter, and if my brother is satisfied to trust this young creature to her devices without a restraining hand, it is my business to submit.

TAGGART—Men look at these things from a different angle from you ladies, Pleione.

MRS. NEARING—A wider one, I suppose you mean to insinuate. All you men are careless and when trouble grows out of your heedlessness you are filled with a sense of injury.

TAGGART—What is this grandson of the Major doing?

MRS. NEARING—Cecil Gordon? Not anything of consequence, save leading the life of a man about town. He spends a good deal of time writing, and now and then gets a poem in a magazine. He brings the manuscripts here to read to Irene, ostensibly for the purpose of obtaining her criticism, her literary judgment being held by him in such high esteem; in reality, to wheedle out praise, for he is vain enough! In his way, this young man is as insufferably conceited and arrogant as Irene's father was in his way. I wonder if modern education renders all men top-heavy?

He claims he is trying to secure a position in some university as an instructor of German. So far, he has not succeeded in locating anything, and he has been in New York since the war broke out.

TAGGART—His funds must be getting low.

MRS. NEARING—He still receives his allowance.

TAGGART—I am glad of that. It will tide him over until he is settled in some permanent paying position. The fact is, the Major wants this young man's mother home with them. The Captain had grip during the Winter, and it left her heart in bad shape and she is too feeble really to go on with the housework, and to say truth, both she and the old warrior are getting on in years and need their daughter. Now, if this young man were placed so that he could help out a little with his salary every month, his mother would be enabled to give up her position and come home and look after the old folks. In short, the Major is so worried about the Captain, whom he considers in a critical condition of health, he has come to New York to lay the matter before Juley. He thought at first he couldn't possibly make the journey, but I assured him he could in all safety, for I'd see him through. And as I had some business myself needed looking after here, I thought it a good time to come and settle it.

MRS. NEARING—I can't imagine any business of yours in the metropolis. It looks pretty strongly as though you came expressly to see after him. It's just like your generous, kindly nature to be always putting yourself out to accommodate others!

TAGGART—I remember once when my accommodating nature got me into serious trouble with one who was very dear to me.

MRS. NEARING—(*Tossing her head.*) It got you into trouble because you didn't use common tact, pru-

dence, or sense in your act of benevolence.

TAGGART—I fear both of us lacked discretion in that particular incident which ended so disastrously.

MRS. NEARING—Look here, Peter Taggart, no one in my presence will charge me as blameworthy in that incident! Any unprejudiced person will bear me out in that I did all that a modest, self-respecting girl could be expected to do toward clearing the matter up and setting things right! You needn't lay your awkward man blundering on me!

TAGGART—Well, then, I take *all* the blame on my shoulders.

MRS. NEARING—I shan't allow that! It was that absent-minded old dreamer of a Dave Ransom, with his head in the clouds, who was the real one at fault and the cause of all our misunderstanding.

TAGGART—Whoever was the real culprit, it's all dead and gone long ago, Pleione, and we've paid for the blunder at the price of fifteen years of our youth and happiness.

MRS. NEARING—(*Sighing.*) True.

TAGGART—(*Coming up behind her.*) Do you know you look very pretty and housewifely in that little dress?

MRS. NEARING—(*With a little embarrassed laugh.*) Oh, this! I bought it at a sale, ready-made, for ninety-eight cents—think of that! Am I not thrifty? It was a real bargain!

TAGGART—More, it is extremely becoming, with that low-cut collar showing your white neck. I never knew you had such a lovely neck; you always dressed it so prim and high.

MRS. NEARING—Perhaps you consider it immodest for a middle-aged woman to expose her neck.

TAGGART—Immodest, when one has a lovely neck to give other people the pleasure of seeing and admiring it!

MRS. NEARING—(*Flushing rosily.*) Peter, you've surely kissed the Blarney stone!

TAGGART—I always think of you, Pleione, as a gracious, efficient fairy dispensing domestic blessings. You are the sort of woman who makes a home a place a fellow likes to stay in, everything is so full of comfort and cheer where you are. It is a shame for you to be spending yourself on another woman's home where your services only open opportunity for her irresponsibility and idleness when you are so amply fitted to make your own a regular paradise!

MRS. NEARING—(*With growing embarrassment.*) Peter, you are extravagant in your flattery.

TAGGART—I've got a big bleak empty house that needs some one to convert it into a liveable place. But there is only one woman who could ever be its mistress and if I can't have her, I'll remain alone to the end of the chapter. Drop that dusting for a few minutes and let's sit down on the couch over there and talk a little.

MRS. NEARING—I must finish.

TAGGART—Look here, Pleione, you know as well as I know, there is only one woman on this footstool for me. Do you guess what my business here is, little woman?

MRS. NEARING—(*With downcast eyes.*) How should I guess?

TAGGART—(*His hand on her shoulder.*) I lost out through my blundering and plumb foolishness, and I can't bring back those years that have fled, but, Pleione, I can try and make 'em up if you'll only let me. In the years that remain, I'll try and crowd all the passion and the sweetness and the joy we missed. I came down here to marry you and take you back with me. (*Puts his arm around her neck.*)

MRS. NEARING—Oh, Peter! this has taken me all unprepared! It's so sudden! We'll have to wait a little.

TAGGART—(*With strong feeling.*) Wait a little! Haven't we waited fifteen years? We can't afford to wait any longer. Every day that goes by and finds us still separated is a day lost that can never be recovered. After a while, sweetheart, we shall grow old and enfeebled and the lust of life will weaken, our eager interest in its concerns will wane, and then there will come a time when our hands will be folded on our quiet breasts and we shall be laid in a deep and silent place where we can no longer see the flitting forms of our precious ones, where we can no longer hear the voice of tenderness and love. Pleione, I have made up my mind we are going to be married without any senseless ado about it.

MRS. NEARING—When?

TAGGART—Right now. This very day. (*Bends and presses his lips to her throat. In a low voice.*) Is it a decision you don't want to hear?

MRS. NEARING—Oh, I don't know what to think, to say! It has taken me so unexpectedly!

TAGGART—(*Tenderly.*) Is the thought of being

my wife hateful to you?

MRS. NEARING—Oh, no, no! I am sure from the time I was a young girl I had accustomed myself to the thought of some day becoming your wife.

TAGGART—You angel!

Enter Major Faring, followed by Cecil Gordon Keith, who is tall, elegant and youthful of form and bears himself with easy grace.

SCENE II

MAJOR FARING—(*Advancing with rolling gait, partially supporting himself by the aid of his cane.*) Well, Peter, you got here ahead of me, this morning. Might have known it. Magnet to draw you, boy, straight to the one place, hey? (*Winks. Puts out his hand to Mrs. Nearing.*) How are you, Pleione? This is my grandson, Cecil Gordon Keith.

MRS. NEARING—(*With a slight toss of her head.*) Oh, I assure you I have had many opportunities of extending my acquaintance with Mr. Keith.

MAJOR FARING—Why, yes, come to think of it, of course you have. He just naturally would gravitate to his grandsire's friends. He's been pilotin' me around this mornin', first for breakfast an' then to call on his mother. I couldn't have done a blamed thing if he hadn't had a close grip on my arm, I was that confused by the rush an' medley. I never saw anything like it. I'd no more dare to go on Broadway alone in that mêlée of noise an' traffic to wait my chance for a surface car than I'd dare walk a tight rope over the German lines! An' Fifth Avenue, with the automo-

biles everlastingly rushin' by like an avalanche, down one side in a solid stream, up on t'other, ain't much better. The hull thing is too excitin' an' calls for too large an output of concentration. Imagine how long Dave Ransom, his eyes turned skyward, his wits preoccupied with wool-gatherin', would have lasted in this place!

MRS. NEARING—Is this your first experience in New York, Major?

MAJOR FARING—I was here once a few days, back in '67.

TAGGART—Guess you find a little change since then.

MAJOR FARING—This whole country has been expandin' some, multiplyin' in numbers, advancin' in standards of livin', since that time, take it from me, Peter. With life growin' more complex every day, with the mania for excitement an' speed increasin' steady, I don't know where this livin' at top pressure is goin' to bring us to.

MRS. NEARING—But you haven't told us how you like the metropolis?

MAJOR FARING—Then I will tell you straight, right now, Pleione, an' get it out of my system. I have no use for it atall! If a feller values his life an' limbs, he will never, after he's forty years old, get on to one of them motor cycles,—a contraption of the very devil to beat the brains out of his head. Likewise, in this here metropolis, where haste chases a feller all day long like the imps of hell an' taps fail to sound at night for lights out an' to bed! Only young spry fellers with eyes like hawks an' ears like weasels, with every faculty close on the job, should

presume to live in a place with elevateds thunderin' over your head, subways beneath your feet, shootin' along their journey as from cannons, street cars janglin' on the surface, automobiles dartin' by with the speed of the wind. It's an unnatural place, full of commotion, overgrown with people an' buildin's an' business in a space too small to draw a decent breath in, or find room to turn around without hittin' some one's elbows. An' what does it all amount to when you come to think about it? What are they accomplishin' here more than any other part of the country is doin'?

I frankly confess I'm too old to steer around in this wilderness of crowds an' traffic, an' too nervous to have my ears tortured by the deafenin' uproar. The quiet humdrum town for mine, where an elderly feller can contain his soul in peace.

Cecil, here, he's young an' he just enjoys the excitement of the risk, an' it's fairly wonderful how he threads his way through the thickest crush by the fraction of an inch, always glidin' out of danger. Two or three times this mornin' I thought we surely were gone, but no, at the psychological moment we made the only step as by a miracle that gave us escape!

KEITH—I am so used to it, I hardly give it a second's thought, and act as by instinct. Being in so many of the capitals of Europe and living so long in Berlin, have accustomed me to the noise and confusion of congested cities.

MAJOR FARING—(*With doting pride.*) Cecil's cosmopolitan, you know.

KEITH—Well, I have knocked around among so many scenes and peoples and have had experiences so varied, that I feel justified in laying claim to being a citizen of the world.

TAGGART—You doubtless find a contrast here to the European world.

KEITH—(*Jauntily.*) I find a less highly developed order of civilization, as is to be expected in a young country that has not yet attained to its full maturity, whose processes indeed still remain largely tentative. And democracy, which tends to the leveling of all classes, doing away entirely with hereditary rank and social distinctions, and is responsible for a great elasticity of conditions and the astonishing transitions of individual status, brings its crudity more clearly to the surface.

MAJOR FARING—Democracy is the golden gate through which all men, regardless of their birth, pass to take their equal opportunities.

KEITH—(*Airily.*) That is demagogical cant that has long imposed on the crowd and given false impressions of life and standards of value to the misled masses.

MAJOR FARING—We owe our opportunities here to our noble an' progressive form of government which aids an' stimulates the endeavors of its citizens.

KEITH—(*Nonchalantly.*) Another highly cherished and antiquated delusion that has tickled the multitude. The man who possesses the desire can make opportunities for himself fully as well under a monarchical or imperialistic form of government as under one of this sort where the rabble unfit and unprepared, elbow

and jostle in order to thrust themselves in the places that should be occupied only by the competent, the highly qualified.

TAGGART—I beg to differ with you. What you have said might apply to the privileged classes or to exceptionally gifted individuals who hew their way irresistibly to their goal, however seemingly insurmountable the obstacles. But it is not possible for the rank and file, whom we term the average men, to receive just opportunities under any form of governmen where the power and the advantages are held exclusively by the hereditary few, which makes inevitable inequalities of the most glaring sort.

KEITH—(*Insolently.*) And what, my dear sir, do the rank and file count? Suppose they are deprived of what you term their just opportunities? Is anything lost thereby? Only the superior men, those of high birth that includes the privileges of education and culture, or those of unusual qualifications and training, or of exceptionally meritorious endowment, concern the progress of the world and contribute to its civilization. Who are fit to be leaders of men, to direct their destinies? Not the average men inefficacious and inadequate who bungle the game, but those who are possessed of sterling intellectual worth and ability adapted to a special design! Such characteristics typify the overman, the man qualified to be Captain of the Host!

(*The Major, knitting his brows, regards him with wondering perplexity and troubled doubt.*)

TAGGART—On the contrary, I should say the man qualified to be Captain of the Host is the man of

disciplined will who is able to command his own spirit!

MRS. NEARING—(*With thinly-veiled sarcasm.*) You must have found it a real cross to be obliged to leave Germany at the outbreak of the war and return to so proletarian a country as America.

KEITH—(*Stroking his small mustache.*) I frankly admit, I prefer the well-conducted system of elegant conservatism that obtains there to the conspicuous want of order and management due to amateur politics, that prevails here. And rather than return, my first impulse was to offer myself to the Germans, but on second thought, considering the high degree of efficiency to which the Kaiser's troops were trained and contrasted with my own absolute want of it, I concluded my services would not be accounted of very much value.

MAJOR FARING—(*With dilating chest.*) Do I understand that you, a free-born American citizen, for a moment considered the possibility of offering yourself to fight in the German ranks?

KEITH—(*With composure.*) I did. Why not?

MAJOR FARING—Why not, indeed! Because the principle for which they are contendin' is basically wrong. *That's why!*

KEITH—How, wrong?

MAJOR FARING—What have men gained after centuries of strife where human blood has been poured out like water to safeguard human rights an' procure human freedom an' all the independence an' self-reliance that grow out of the exercise of self-government, if in this modern age of wonderful progress an' advancement along every line of thought an' endeavor,

the retrogressive principle of imperialism upheld by the sheer might of arms is to be forced on an unwilling world against the best convictions an' desires of civilization—against the entire trend of evolution!

KEITH—It's only because yours is a provincial way of looking at it. The strong must prevail.

MAJOR FARING—Might is not right! The principle is wrong, I tell you.

KEITH—You are convinced of that because of the fact solely that you have been nurtured to democratic ideals and you think that the only right sort of government can be one whose source is in the people, regardless of whether they are prepared or indeed capable of administering it. Imperialism, to my mind, is much better when the power is vested in the hands of those few who are qualified by the tests of efficiency, —brains and education and thorough training,—to wield authority.

MAJOR FARING—With *carte blanche* to wield it justly or unjustly, as suits their advantage. If your education abroad for the purpose of emancipatin' your understandin' an 'broadenin' your outlook on life has brought you to a pass where you repudiate the traditions of this great country, an' become an apostate to your own government in order to espouse one that is founded on a system of individual subordination an' dependence, I say you have lost more than you have gained, if you are the most learned young man turned out of any university. (*Violently.*) I have heard enough, sir!

KEITH—(*With a shrug, and abruptly to Mrs. Nearing.*) Where is Mrs. Longworthy this morn-

ing?

MRS. NEARING—She isn't up yet. When she is out until after midnight, as she has been of late, she has to make up her sleep, and usually lies until noon. She had her breakfast in bed this morning.

TAGGART—For a girl bred in the country, that's going some.

(*Irene's voice, gayly.*) Don't criticize the absent, for sometimes the unseen have ears that hear! (*The door is pushed open.*)

Enter Irene, with a frou-frou of draperies, wearing a trailing morning gown of soft white, lace-trimmed, lined with strawberry silk. On her feet are high-heeled strawberry satin slippers. Her hair, built to the crown of her head, is upheld by a high back-comb set with brilliants.

(*She advances with undulating grace, nods lightly to Keith, and puts out her hand to Major Faring.*)

IRENE—How are you, Major?

SCENE III

MAJOR FARING—(*With wondering admiration.*) Well, I'm beat, if you haven't become a regular city woman!

IRENE—(*Laughing softly.*) It doesn't take long to metamorphose my sex, we are so adaptable. (*Shakes hands with Taggart.*) To see you both together again seems like old times.

MAJOR FARING—(*Solemnly.*) There is one who should be here, will never come again.

(*A shadow flits over Irene's face, but clears almost*

instantly.)

IRENE—(*In a rallying voice.*) I think you are a very courageous man to brave the perils of this big congested city.

MAJOR FARING—I think so, too, at my age. When a man gets to be eighty-odd, gallivantin' around overgrown cities ain't his strong suit; but I came with a purpose.

IRENE—Ah, indeed!

MAJOR FARING—I came to persuade my Juley that it is her duty to give up her position here an' come home an' take care of her old parents. Her mother is very poorly this spring, an' I'm far from being as husky as formerly, an' we surely need her as never before.

IRENE—And is she properly convinced?

MAJOR FARING—She has consented, lookin' to Cecil, here, to land that position he is expectin', for he can help us out when her salary stops.

KEITH—(*Nonchalantly.*) I have not the slightest doubt but what I shall be permanently located by next September. My Arbeit is an excellent endorsement, and I have received encouraging answers to my applications.

MAJOR FARING—This is a world, Cecil, in which most of us are obliged to work for our livin', an' your mother has earned hers a good many years, an' it's time she quit.

IRENE—(*To Taggart.*) I didn't know you had any special partiality for New York, Mr. Taggart.

TAGGART—To say the truth, I haven't. Like the Major, a purpose also induced my trip. To make a

clean breast of it, I have come expressly to take your sister-in-law back with me. We are going to be married this afternoon.

IRENE—(*Clasping her hands enthusiastically.*) Oh, how novel!

MAJOR FARING—Well, if I ain't jiggered, and you ain't the sly dog! But I might have seen which way the wind was settin'. You the confirmed old batch! but better late than never. Congratulations! (*Shakes Taggart heartily by the hand.*) Peter, my boy, if you'd hunted the world over, you couldn't find a better choice than the one you've made. She's a Number One-A housekeeper, an' the best little woman goin', an' believe me, you're makin' no mistake in selectin' her for a wife!

TAGGART—(*Modestly.*) I reckon I know that.

KEITH—Wish you every happiness, sir.

MRS. NEARING—(*Drawing a deep breath.*) If that isn't an exhibition of nerve! It's wholly of his own concocting, and he's taking it all for granted. I haven't consented to a thing.

TAGGART—You haven't vetoed it. Now get your belongings packed up, Pleione, for I am going for the license and this afternoon we'll hunt out a parson. Come along, Kit.

MAJOR FARING—I'm on! (*He rises heavily.*)

TAGGART—(*Taking from his breast pocket some cigars.*) Have one, Major.

MAJOR FARING—(*With a show of reluctance.*) Really, now, it's my turn, you know. I can't always be acceptin' from you, Peter.

TAGGART—(*Waving away his objection.*) Sh!

Your cigars aren't as good as mine, and you know it. Besides, the treats are on me to-day.

Exeunt Major Faring, with a great pounding of his cane, and Taggart.

MRS. NEARING—Well, if that isn't the most precipitate, the most importunate man I ever ran across! His haste is something indecorous! If his impudence in springing this thing isn't colossal, I don't know what is! But when a man gets his head fully set, there is no gainsaying him. (*Glances at the little clock on the mantel.*) I have got short enough time to get ready in as it is. (*Starts toward the door.*)

IRENE—Can I help you, sister Pleione?

MRS. NEARING—You'd only hinder me, child. I know just where I can put my hand on everything.

Exit Mrs. Nearing, in her haste forgetting to close the door after her, which is unnoticed by Keith and Irene.

SCENE IV

KEITH—This is certainly an interesting situation, with the old guy in love with the she-dragon and a middle-aged romance about to end in a belated marriage.

IRENE—We'll all get middle-aged sooner or later.

KEITH—(*Fitting a cigarette in his long amber tube.*) We can be reconciled to falling in the sere and yellow leaf if we feel we had our chance at life whilst we were young. If that isn't the most provincial bunch I ever had the fortune to run up against!

Rich! My Trojan grandsire, with his grandiloquent self-complacency, and bombastic assurance and know-it-allness,—the dapper rural swain,—the sedate and proper, the discreet widow with her prim little airs of coquetry,—all three are characters fit for a barn-storming play! It's delicious!

IRENE—Cecil Gordon, do you know I am surprised sometimes at things you say! From a young gentleman of such elegant tastes and refined culture, some of your remarks betray a vein of positive coarseness.

KEITH—(*Laughing easily.*) That comes from my student associations. Students are a rough and ready class, notoriously wanting in respect, and proverbially frank to the point of brutality in their opinions. But, honest Injun, jesting aside, Irene, it is the most amazingly unique homespun outfit one could, I verily believe, find in this queerly assorted, preposterous America.

IRENE—You find them very amusing, but don't forget they are the kind I have been forced to consort with my whole life long.

KEITH—Poor kiddie! But don't you forget, I have been a fellow-sufferer also. I, too, was doomed to be marooned with them until I was pretty well raised, as the Virginians say. And since my association with men and women of the world, I find such provincialism simply astonishing!

IRENE—(*Archly.*) We might run the risk of being called young prigs.

KEITH—(*Laughing.*) When people surpass the common herd they are privileged to be prigs. Superior merit cannot remain unconscious of itself.

Fortunately, you are likely now to be relieved of any further penance as regards their society, for they won't have reason to inflict themselves on you any more. And surely we ought to be supremely grateful to this rustic gallant for removing the she-dragon from her self-imposed duty of sentinelship.

IRENE—She doesn't approve of *you*.

KEITH—I know that well, hence the unslackening vigilance at her post.

IRENE—(*Pouting.*) Meddlesome old thing! She came here at my own invitation to initiate me in the mysteries of housekeeping, and right away she constituted herself my duenna. Oh, I get so tired of her everlasting guardianship! I just feel she is watching and disapproving of me all the while, even when she doesn't say anything. She acts it and makes me feel I am a little girl who hasn't sense enough to steer herself alone! And it robs me of my independence, besides spoiling my pleasure. If Joe doesn't take the trouble to meddle with what I do, in fact doesn't mind, why should she?

KEITH—Good old scout! That husband of yours is another remarkable individuality, but he is so genuinely a man that he is quite removed from the hazard of being ludicrous.

IRENE—(*Stiffly.*) I am so glad he escapes your derision.

KEITH—He has my admiration. In this age of sham, when the most of us humbugs and make-believes are trying to impose on each other by pretending we are something other than we are, he's so unfeigned, so real, as to command respect. (*Blowing out a wreath*

of smoke.) What is he doing these days? I hardly ever see him.

IRENE—He is busy. He has an office downtown where he spends much of his time, and when he is home he writes at his desk in the dining-room, and I noticed the table was covered with a lot of maps. Yet for all that, he has repeatedly offered his services to escort me out evenings, but I always decline by saying I have already accepted your invitation.

KEITH—What does he say to that?

IRENE—All right.

KEITH—He doesn't act offended, then?

IRENE—Joe offended? Oh, no! But as to what is occupying him: A syndicate of capitalists are concerned in a big mining venture in the Far West called the Sunflower Gold Mining Consolidated, and they want him to assume the managership of it as he is considered one of the best mining authorities in the country. Though he has not said anything to me about it I wouldn't be surprised any time we broke up here altogether.

KEITH—But he wouldn't think of such a thing as exiling you to some rough God-forsaken country!

IRENE—Probably not. But even worse he might think it the expedient course I be transported back to that impossible town where plenty more corresponding to the specimens that afford you such amusement are to be found in their native state of luxuriance and crudity. He lifted the mortgages from my father's house and it is still unsold and I probably will be offered a choice between that and the old Longworthy homestead he fitted up for his sister's occupancy. Can

you think of anything worse than to be buried again in that stale, flat, stuffy little burg?

KEITH—You are not a bale of goods, to be sent here or there at any one's behest.

IRENE—(*Shaking her head.*) I am absolutely penniless. That has always been my tragedy, for it has deprived me of my independence, made me helpless.

KEITH—Rot! Gad, for a girl of spirit to make such an admission! You can assert your will, you can take things in your own hands, can't you? When matters get unbearable, end them.

IRENE—So far, they have not been unbearable.

KEITH—But they will be if this husband of yours asks you to do anything that is odious to you, and precisely then you are entirely justified in rebelling.

IRENE—He has always been so kind to me, and patient with my follies. His is a noble nature.

KEITH—What of that? You don't for a moment pretend that a delicate, pretty, fastidious little person like yourself married that big, uncouth fellow, with his coarse, hardened hands, because you loved him?

IRENE—His hands are toil-hardened, but he is tender as a woman and has never spoken a rough word to me. From the first, he was good and generous.

KEITH—Why shouldn't he be, when it was his aim to win your confidence and gratitude to the end he might annex your youth and beauty!

IRENE—Oh, how strange that sounds!

KEITH—Perhaps it's blunt, but it's true. What is there in common between you and him? Your tastes are not congenial. To begin with, he is old enough to be your father. Such a marriage is a misfit.

IRENE—I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that.

KEITH—I will talk so. Do you dare assert you married him because you loved him?

IRENE—There is so much to him to command respect. I tell you he is different from all other men I ever have met.

KEITH—You have met scarcely any with whom to compare him.

IRENE—I have met you.

KEITH—You are just hedging, Irene, as women always do when they want to conceal the truth. Be honest. You married him for the simple reason you didn't know what else to do with yourself, and because he represented the one and only available opportunity that could deliver you from your difficulties.

IRENE—(*With agitation.*) I protest when you, an outsider, analyze any conditions that obtained in my past which concerned me alone, or sum up on your assumption my reasons for marrying the man who is my husband.

KEITH—Grandstand talk! Do you seriously mean it when you call me an outsider?

IRENE—I say it is an unwarrantable liberty. It is not fair.

KEITH—Fair? You must have known that sooner or later we would reach a point where a show-down was inevitable.

IRENE—(*Trying to rise.*) I must not listen.

KEITH—(*Restraining her.*) Don't simulate resentment at this late hour. I know it is the custom for women to artfully play the prude at the crucial moment, but you are too direct and sincere a child of

nature for such worn-out devices. I know it is the habit of your siren sex to adroitly lead men on to the place where they are no longer able to contain their feelings and blurt out the whole passion that has overmastered them, and then pretend ignorance, feign shocked surprise, holding themselves back in order to be more maddeningly enticing and precious. I am deadly in earnest, Irene, and I am not going to be put off by artful evasions that ill become you. It was your straightforward honesty, your absence of affectation that attracted me, for I have had plenty of experience with the ordinary wiles of women. Now listen, kid. You saw from the first I found pleasure in your society, I was interested in you, and being of that sex whose instinct is to ensnare and take captive mine, you must have felt that your lure was potent; you could not have been blind to the fact that day by day my interest was deepening, that the magnet was drawing me closer and closer. It was more than the passing admiration of a young man for a beautiful, high-spirited and original girl, it was more than mere transient liking or fondness, and it grew into an infatuation that I can no longer control. (*With strong feeling.*) I am intoxicated with your charms, your looks, the fascinating little ways of you, with the curve of those rosy lips into your adorable smile, with the downward sweep of your lashes,—everything about you is unspeakably alluring to me. Consciously or unconsciously, you are drawing me irresistibly whither you will. I love you passionately, madly, to the point where I am ready to throw everything to the winds for your sake!

IRENE—I beg you to stop! Do you not realize that by tearing away the barriers of convention between us that have served as a protection to me, a salutary restraint to you, you have utterly spoiled our relations?

KEITH—(*Exultantly.*) Then you concede you have known to what we were tending!

IRENE—It is impossible after this avowal I receive you ever again!

KEITH—(*Masterfully.*) I intend to have no compromise about it. I am going to speak out the entire truth and then we shall see! I have been a careless, sneering, cynical fellow, Irene, without belief in man's integrity or woman's truth, mocking at the conventions that safeguard society, scoffing at the things others hold in reverence; but you have shaken me out of my indifference into a new earnestness, into a sense of responsibility. I am still on the threshold of my career, and through the might of this love I bear you it is within your power to change my life, to direct my gifts into worthy and distinguished channels, to make of me a useful, a great man!

IRENE—(*With emotion.*) This is not right!

KEITH—It *is* right, for it is natural that youth in its divine freshness, its first triumphant bloom, should mate with youth alone. And Nature never errs. (*Ardently.*) Think of it, little girl,—we are nearly of the same years, belonging to the same generation of knowledge and glorious emancipation of thought; ours is the age of generous sentiments, of sympathetic responsive emotions, we feel the splendid enthusiasms, like noble wine, glowing through our veins, the tempestuous rush of passion along all our pulses! Our

tastes are allied, our aspirations, our dreams, are kindred, our pursuits are similar; we love pleasure, we hunger for novelty, we would quaff the cup of experience to its dregs, we crave life, ever more life! We long for happiness with an unquenchable desire whose eager intensity approaches pain! We have to look forward to long years of health and bounding vitality and opportunity! They are ours, all ours, to have and to enjoy! (*Irene's head droops. He draws her to his breast.*) You liked me a little from the beginning, Liebchen. Is it not so? Look up in my eyes and tell me—is it not so?

IRENE—I am a wicked, unnatural girl!

KEITH—Liebes Kind, dear little one, no, no! It is youth speaking to you through my lips, craving the boon of love, my darling! Is not love youth's inheritance? It is youth in its exultant strength, its resistless, all-conquering, imperious might, suing for possession, pleading fulfilment. And to its call you cannot do other than surrender. Might must and will prevail.

IRENE—(*Bursting into tears.*) You have put a spell on me. I feel a weakening in all my limbs, a tremulous ecstasy to my finger-tips. I should have resisted this, drawn away in time. I should have known better.

KEITH—(*Kissing the tears away.*) Do you think for a moment our being brought together was through any accident or fortuitous circumstance? Or that this consummation is through any fault on your part? Indeed, no! It was meant we should meet, it was foreordained we should come together—I as your Mann, you as meine kleine Frau.

IRENE—But this is sheer folly, Cecil. You forget I am already bound in marriage.

KEITH—(*Laughing lightly.*) How long will an arbitrary institution like marriage, framed to the uses of a highly artificial civilization, withstand the natural desire of the human heart?

IRENE—He has been good to me and I owe him something.

KEITH—You owe him everything if you love him. If not, you are exempted from the full price of the debt.

IRENE—By my legal contract, I have taken obligations.

KEITH—What then? They cease when your love goes to its destined port; for love is a thing that the bonds of man-made law cannot fetter, or alike the decrees of social expediency, confine!

IRENE—What am I to do? Oh, what am I to do?

KEITH—You shouldn't worry.

IRENE—But he must know, he has got to know!

KEITH—And he will know.

IRENE—I have not the courage to tell him.

KEITH—*I* will tell him.

(*Irene gives a cry of stifled terror and huddles against the sofa. Keith, following her gaze, beholds Longworthy, drawn up to his full magnificent proportions, standing in the doorway. His splendid person as though chiseled from marble, his motionless attitude, instinct with dignity and power, resembles one of the Olympian gods. Keith slowly rises to his full height and the two men for half a minute steadily confront one another.*)

Scene V

Longworthy—(*Slowly breaking the silence.*) It is not my custom to play the eavesdropper in any house, let alone in my own. But the door was ajar and I could not avoid hearing your voices and your conversation was of such a singular nature as to so strongly arouse my curiosity that I may be pardoned for listening. I ask you what your intentions are toward this girl.

Keith—I answer they are wholly honorable, sir.

Longworthy—(*Drawing a deep breath.*) Your acts thus far do not give much warranty of that or inspire much confidence in your word. You call it honorable to come into a man's house, accept his hospitality, and whilst enjoying his confidence, deliberately betray it by stealing away the affections of his wife?

Keith—You encouraged me to come here, sir, and to escort her about.

Longworthy—True. I wanted her to have her heart's desire, which was to see a little, and to enjoy some of the pleasures of which her restricted environment had deprived her. And you seemed better qualified to show her this life and initiate her in these pleasures than I.

Keith—And you must have taken into account that two ardent young people of nearly the same age, possessed of talent and education and their share of good looks, at the most impressionable period of their lives, would prove singularly attractive to one another. You must have known the temptations to which our continual association, brought to so familiar a footing,

exposed us. You could not have been blind to the risk we ran, or to the contingency of this happening. And what has resulted having been aided largely through your own instrumentality, you therefore cannot thrust the blame back on me.

LONGWORTHY—I had considered all these things, but I banked on the fact that you both possessed a common measure of honor, that she knew her duty, and I could trust her, *and that you, sir, were a man!*

KEITH—I am a man with my own code of honor.

LONGWORTHY—(*Taking a step forward.*) A strange code! You were perfectly aware that this girl was young, you saw that she was entirely ignorant of the ways of the world, and you who were thoroughly practised in them, took base advantage of both her youth and her inexperience!

KEITH—I had no thought of taking any advantage of either. There had come upon me this incomprehensible, this wonderful, this stupendous thing, tyrannous as sweet, that has revealed deeps in my nature and possibilities I never dreamed existed, and I only knew that I wanted her, that I must have her, and that nothing should prevent my having her! I believe that a supreme love is something outside our power of volition or seeking. It comes without premonition or warning, and it is so resistless that every other thing must give way before it.

LONGWORTHY—A true man resists what he knows to be wrong.

KEITH—(*With kindling glance.*) But I protest it is *not* wrong. It is God-given! *You* can't understand how a man is overwhelmed by a thing of this

sort when you have never experienced it. (*With passionate rebuke.*) You had no right to take this girl into your possession, you who were not akin to her in thought or desire! You had no right to bind her buoyant youth to your staid middle age, to shackle her eager, restless spirit with the rigid fetters of duty! It was a monstrous wrong on your part, sir, and deserving of severest condemnation!

LONGWORTHY—What I did was done only with the thought of her good. In an embarrassing and difficult situation, I was actuated by what seemed to her best advantage. She was immature, a mere child in the ways of experience, and after her father's death utterly alone and penniless, and I married her in order to have the right to protect her. But we will not discuss that now. What I want to get at is what you proposed to do.

KEITH—It was simple enough. I had intended going West to see something of this country, but first, before starting, I had intended to persuade her to meet me in California. I knew, of course, as a logical sequence to her flight, you would move for a divorce on the ground of abandonment, and I also knew it would not be a difficult matter for her in one of those Western states to procure a release from you, and then I would marry her.

LONGWORTHY—For a young man of such startlingly original ethical ideas, it seems a rather stale program. Couldn't you think up anything a little more novel?

KEITH—It was my first thought. But later, when I came to give it more reflection, I was immediately convinced that there was only one honorable course

open to me and that was to go straight to you, lay the entire situation before you and put it up to you as man to man. I hoped you would see the matter in its true light and be willing to do the square thing.

LONGWORTHY—And because you wanted it so, you thought I would tamely surrender my rights without making the slightest opposition in order you might step into my place! A naïve inference! Only you reckoned without giving consideration to the point of view of the other party or to what action he might take. Your understanding of me was erroneous. I tell you right here, I am not the sort of man to yield my claims without desperate resistance. A husband worthy of the name does not, without a struggle, give over his wife to the first insolent young trifler who comes along!

KEITH—I hoped, when you came to see the injustice of binding this young girl against the desire of her heart, that you would voluntarily resign her to the one whom she alone loves. Marriage is a union of two people for life, organized simply to meet the expediencies of the State, and like any institution that seeks to compel the human will, constrain the human feelings, repress natural impulses, it is at best autocratic; but, sir, when love is not present, I care not if this institution be sanctioned by ten thousand laws, there is only one word that expresses it!

LONGWORTHY—(*Turning from him to Irene.*) You think you love this man?

IRENE—(*Shrinking.*) Oh, don't ask me, please, Joe!

LONGWORTHY—Don't be afraid. Have I ever been harsh to you at any of those times when you con-

fessed to me what was the truth, however unpalatable it might be? Then speak out and do not fear. Do you think you love this man?

IRENE—Yes.

LONGWORTHY—(*Quietly.*) Don't you think there is something due to me, child?

IRENE—(*Bursting into tears.*) Indeed, indeed, I know there is, more than I can repay.

LONGWORTHY—(*Gently.*) Don't you think you owe some measure of gratitude to me for giving you a chance in this great wonderful world of many interests to see and enjoy a little of what there is of pleasure and profit in it,—for trying to put a little sunshine in your young life?

IRENE—Oh, don't talk about it! It makes me seem such a worthless wretch!

LONGWORTHY—(*Softly.*) And did you not at any time ever care a little for the old fellow who meant only to be kind to you?

IRENE—How could I help it when I knew him to be the noblest, the most generous man!

LONGWORTHY—(*His hand to his brow.*) My only thought as regarded you was to gratify your desires, to give you pleasure. Your wistful eyes, your eager voice, appealed to me as nothing else could have done. for I saw in that look, I heard in those tones, the longing all over again that possessed my own starved youth. I resolved you should not be denied as others were denied for the want of opportunity and money. Then after your father's death you were so entirely alone and dependent, you were so exposed to the world, I feared for you, and so it seemed expedient to better

shield you to take you to myself. Could that be called an unfair advantage of you? Perhaps my own feelings enhanced that need of protection, made my responsibility for your security seem greater than it really was. Perhaps I deceived myself and selfish motives were at the root of my benevolent concern for your welfare. You had entered my life late as a sunbeam flashes athwart the gloom of a somber and waning day. I had known so few women and when, after the lonely years, your radiant youth came to my middle age it was a revelation of joy such as in my wildest flights of fancy I had never dared to anticipate. You personified my ideals of womanly grace and beauty. In you I found the realization of my boyhood's most sacred, most precious dreams! I felt such a pride in winning you as I had never experienced in the bitterest fought struggle of my life, or its hardest earned success! (*He reels and staggers to a chair and covers his face.*)

KEITH—(*With deep emotion.*) This has become a tragedy, sir. You love her!

LONGWORTHY—(*His hands shaking convulsively.*) Love her? Love her? A man does not usually make parade of his profoundest affections, but rather lets his deeds speak for him. But in justice to himself at a supreme crisis when he is pleading for his happiness, it is meet he leave no stone unturned in his efforts to move the beloved one by his appeal and bring her back to her loyalty. (*To Irene.*) If you think I have been so absorbed in business as to be neglectful of you it was unintentional, my sweet, and I humbly crave your forgiveness. But a man in his

strong prime must go forth to the lists as did knights of old, to battle in the thick of the great combat, must in his day and his generation do his part of the world's work; and as a wife your pride would be in that I was known of men, that by force of my doughty arm I had won my honorable place among them! Because I am a silent man perhaps you have thought you were not loved with the passionate ardor your fiery impetuous nature demanded, your youth had a right to expect; perhaps you have missed the words of eloquent tenderness, the glowing declarations. But, Irene, though my words are few and clumsily expressed, my love for you is none the less deep and strong and abiding. Whenever I look out upon the marvels of this majestic and stupendous world and muse upon that transcendent power that has wrought them out of self-created substance from the most ponderous to the most airy and immaterial, choosing thus to manifest itself, I reflect with exultation that you are of the choicest handiwork of this universal genius! When I awaken in the hush of the virgin morn and see the miracle of the rising sun filling the eastern sky with blushes at the first signals of his oncoming presence, and lift my soul to my Maker's throne in rapture and gratitude for this priceless boon of life, I thank Him with swelling breast for his gift of you, my sweet, my bride! When I behold at the close of day the splendid sunset clouds that make the entire heavens one great canvas of glorious color, when later I see the stars glittering in the dark blue dome and all the mystery and the grandeur circle me about and fill my being with wondering awe, I raise my thoughts On High in mute

prayer of thanksgiving for the peace and the mercy that have descended upon me so unworthy as I am of His goodness, and I render my fervent acknowledgment again for His gracious grant of you, my heart, my life! All that is beautiful, that thrills the senses, stirs the imagination, all that is sublime, that elevates and inspires is associated in my thoughts with you! I never hear the strains of magnificent music, a Hungarian rhapsody, a sonorous Beethoven sonata, unless I feel that the divine spirit which is revealed through them as it is revealed in the air, the light, and the clouds of heaven, is incarnated in part in my girl wife! A melodious Schubert song speaks of her. For what is more lovely, more consummately perfect than the purity of youth, the dawning grace of womanhood? (*He rises and approaches her with outstretched arms.*) And now do you comprehend how I cannot for a moment bring myself to abide the thought of resigning you to another, you the one thing I value beyond compare! Let adversity strip me of all I have wrested in toil and sweat from the grudging earth, leaving you only, my fairest treasure, my gem of gems, and I remain a rich man beyond the dreams of other men's avarice! (*With a smile of wistful entreaty.*) My little one, you have been dazzled by this young man's looks and address, you have been fascinated by the dashing ways of the citizen of the world, but it was only the temporary infatuation of idle and restless moments and reached not to the deeper fibers of your affection, and now your eyes are opened. (*Still smiling, he bends over her. In a voice of exquisite winning tenderness.*)

You know now it was not genuine, and that there is only one you truly love. (*His voice sinks to a whisper.*) You are sorry. You are going to confess that to your husband. (*He pauses. Irene conceals her face. He speaks again very gently.*) My dearest, a relation such as we two bear to one another consecrated by the Creator of life, sanctioned by human laws, is not lightly put aside. Together we entered upon those domestic interests that strengthen the bonds of wedded love, those intimate confidences that hallow it and unite one to the other more closely; together we entered upon those sacred joys belonging only to the one man and to the one woman. And the primal innocence you brought to me was not more virgin than the innocence I brought to you! My wife, could you go to another, you who have yielded yourself to me, who in the silent hours of the night, gathered close in these arms that would shield you from the whole world, have lain upon this heart whose deep pulsations have spoken its message to yours,—have felt these lips pressed upon your lips in ecstatic kisses? Ah, no, no!

IRENE—You torture me! (*Shrinks from him.*) Oh, I cannot bear it!

LONGWORTHY—Does not my appeal of yearning tenderness, my passion of tremulous hope—my despair—move you?

IRENE—Say no more if you have any pity!

LONGWORTHY—(*In a stricken voice.*) I have lost! (*Rises and advances to Keith.*) You are the victor, for in you the insolence of youth and education has triumphed. What chance had I, a poor common man,

against such odds? What a fatuous hope that I could keep this untamed bird from beating her wild wings against the bars of the dull cage in which I had confined her! . . . In you two, I had from the first a peculiar interest. In her because of her inexperience, her helplessness, and her sex; in you, because in the days of my father's extremity, your grandfather more than once came to his aid. I resolved then, if it were ever within my power to show my gratitude for the services he rendered my family in their stress, I would do the Major a good turn.

KEITH—(*Exultantly.*) And now that the chance has at last presented itself, you will do the one thing which will effectuate the happiness of his grandson.

LONGWORTHY—(*Unheeding the interruption.*) Later when you grew into boyhood, I saw my chance to repay the debt of his many kindnesses for, good as was his will, he was unable to give you the advantages of a more advanced scholarship. I made inquiries concerning you. I learned you were a brilliant and promising boy and I then found my opportunity at hand.

KEITH—(*In a bewildered voice.*) You then found your opportunity at hand? What do you mean? . . . Am I to understand that my university education in this country and abroad I owe to you?

LONGWORTHY—It was my one occasion to repay the Major.

KEITH—You are the unknown benefactor!

LONGWORTHY—Did you not, then, surmise it?

KEITH—Surmise it? It never entered my head! I would rather it were any one else save you. (*Sinks*

heavily into a chair, his arms falling limply down. In a strained voice.) You are well requited.

LONGWORTHY—Don't take that too deeply to heart. I am sorry I told you. I thought you had guessed it.

KEITH—(*Springing to his feet.*) Oh, that I had, that I had!

LONGWORTHY—(*Quietly.*) For so long I have stood in a protecting relation toward you, as also later toward her, that in my feelings for you both there is an element of paternalism, and it will not be difficult for me who am so much your senior to soon bring myself to regarding you as my children.

KEITH—(*Walking distractedly to and fro.*) Could my position be more utterly desperate? I believe I am the most miserable man on this earth and the best thing for me to do is to end it all with a bullet in my brain!

LONGWORTHY—Don't talk extravagantly. Let us be sensible and adopt the only sane course in this matter that is open to us. You have won. Now listen! It is my wish you continue coming here as before, a friend of us both. You will receive the same hospitality, you will act as escort to her as formerly. You will control your ardor and be patient and restrained until this matter can be quietly arranged in a manner that will avoid busy prattling and scandal. Leave it to me. I promise you I will do all in my power to bring it as speedily as possible to a settlement that will be satisfactory to you both. My sister has just told me she is to be married this afternoon. I want to caution you not to destroy her pleasure in this great event and upset her peace of mind

by letting her know of this. (*He turns away.*)

IRENE—(*In a voice of thrilling anguish.*) Joe! Where are you going?

LONGWORTHY—I am going out for a brief time, but I shall be back to see my sister off.

IRENE—I am a wretched little beast! (*Throws herself on him.*)

LONGWORTHY—Don't distress yourself, dearie. I am not reproaching you, am I?

IRENE—Oh, if you only would, it would be some relief!

LONGWORTHY—This thing has happened without intention on your part. It has come unawares. (*Stroking her hair.*) There, there!

IRENE—You try to put the best construction you can on my behavior.

LONGWORTHY—(*In surprise.*) Why shouldn't I? Was it not as I said?

IRENE—I meant to flirt with him a little, just for the zest of making a conquest of him, as girls who feel themselves safe like the excitement of attracting the admiration of unattached men and bringing them to their feet. And before I knew it——

LONGWORTHY—The fire burned you.

IRENE—It came; I don't know how, but all at once the first I knew I was absorbed by It, for It had entered my heart and fully possessed it. I wanted to be in his presence, to gaze upon his face, to hear him speak, to see his smile bent upon me. And I found myself, in the brief intervals of his absence, restless, unable to settle down to any occupation, awaiting with feverish expectancy the time when he

would come again, anxiously listening for his ring, the sound of his voice in the hall below. I can only liken It, Joe, to the delirium of some strange malady that laid my entire being under an imperious spell against my better sense and judgment, filling my brain with wild fancies. . . . It was all so different than with you, who were so big and quiet and earnest and for whom I felt such respect that I stood in half awe of you. I felt none of that with him, he was careless and jesting and gay, and it was always good-humored raillery and laughter and play-making. Rarely were we serious and seldom meant what we said, or said what we meant. I am so sorry it has happened, but I couldn't help it! I have been like a ship on the great waves of the ocean, tossed hither and thither by the force of the tempest! (*In a choked voice.*) I tell you I couldn't help it!

LONGWORTHY—I understand.

IRENE—Most men would be so enraged, so implacable, making no allowances.

LONGWORTHY—Would that have changed anything?

IRENE—I ought to have confessed all to you and begged you to save me, but I was a coward and it was so alluring—so sweet! (*Lays her head against his breast. With the wistful entreaty of a child.*) I wanted him! I wanted him, Joe.

LONGWORTHY—Suppose you get ready some sort of a spread for the wedding party when they return—not anything elaborate but just a little family breakfast to show our attention.

KEITH—Do you wish any one outside, sir, to be

invited?

LONGWORTHY—Only the Major, besides our own immediate family. Six are enough.

IRENE—I will at once set about it.

LONGWORTHY—That's right.

IRENE—Please kiss me just once, Joe, so that I will know you do not harbor hard feelings toward me. Oh, I am such an ungrateful, wicked wretch!

LONGWORTHY—(*Patting her head.*) Don't grieve, little heart. *Exit Longworthy.*

(*Keith, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, takes two or three restless turns around the room.*)

KEITH—This is a most extraordinary situation and there has been granted far more than I had dared to hope for. He is a royal trump to lose so gamely. Now that I have found I owe him so much, I wish it hadn't been he. (*Gloomily.*) It seems so damned ungrateful to make such a return to the poor old duffer! (*More cheerfully.*) Well, it can't be helped. . . . Your husband, Irene, is not one to do things by halves, for his capitulation has been unconditional. He has acceded to everything that will ultimately secure our union.

IRENE—(*In a strained voice.*) He is only thinking of me—of my happiness.

KEITH—The man is an out and out dead sport.

IRENE—Only one man in ten thousand men could have been capable of an act of such self-renunciation. He is not considering himself—he is only concerned with me.

KEITH—It makes it less troublesome for us, for now

he will help instead of hindering us, as so many resentful husbands would do. (*He approaches her.*) Well? (*Looks at her steadily with an exultant smile.*) Well? (*Draws close to her and puts his arm around her shoulders. Irene, with a smart slap on his cheek, jerks quickly away.*)

KEITH—What?

IRENE—(*Angrily.*) You forget the one proviso he imposed, which is to be patient and restrained until this matter is adjusted. If you break it, I warn you I shall refuse to see you again alone, or indeed permit you to come here at all until you can promise to live up to it.

KEITH—(*Lightly.*) All right, I promise. I'll make it up to myself after we are married.

IRENE—(*In a wondering voice.*) After we are married! It is such a queer thought. (*Puts her hand to her brow.*) Everything turned around and I living with another man. It will be having *two* husbands. There is something downright indelicate about it. I wonder if divorced women always feel so.

KEITH—(*Facetiously.*) A change of partners for the dance.

IRENE—(*With an offended air.*) It is not a jesting matter, Cecil, and, anyway, the joke is a very coarse one that grates awfully.

KEITH—I beg your pardon, I'm a student, you know.

IRENE—A student can have nice feeling.

KEITH—Oh, come now! I am humbly contrite. I'll go down on my knees if it will conciliate you.

IRENE—(*Smiling.*) You needn't exhibit any monkey shines. (*With a bustling air of importance.*) I

have got to get busy right away in the dining-room. I am going to press Nellie in my service to get out the best china, the cut glass and the rose-pattern damask tablecloth and napkins sister Pleione embroidered with my monogram. And, oh, Cecil, do you want to do an errand for me?

KEITH—(*Gallantly.*) Of course! A hundred!

IRENE—Well, I'll be content for you to do two. Get at the florist's two dozen pink roses for a centerpiece and a box of smilax. And go either to Gimbel's or Macy's and buy me six yards of pink satin ribbon an inch and a half wide.

KEITH—What do you want of six yards of ribbon?

IRENE—To trim the table, you stupid! I will myself 'phone to a caterer to send a quart of chicken salad, ice cream in fancy shapes for six, two kinds of choice wedding cake, lady fingers and macaroons; yes, and a big white bride cake. It would be a wedding collation with the wedding left out if I forgot that! Nellie will make her nice coffee. (*With exaggerated cheerfulness.*) Now I've got to run along, little boy, because I've got so much to see to and to dress and everything in time for the wedding party to sit down to breakfast! You won't forget the ribbon and roses, Cecil?

KEITH—I never forget anything intrusted to me, kid. I'll go while the commission is fresh in my mind.

Exit Irene, followed by Keith.

For a few brief moments the stage is empty.

Reënter Keith, wearing his overcoat, his hat on his head, and drawing on his gloves. He makes several

irresolute turns around the room, turns his eyes with slow wistful glances from object to object, as though trying to impress them on his memory. Moves toward the door, wavers in his purpose and comes back. Goes to the mantel and takes from it a small photograph of Irene set in a tiny oval frame of silver. Gazes at the picture long and earnestly, and puts it, with a quick movement, in his breast pocket. Buttons his overcoat carefully over his breast. Leans against the mantel, his elbow on it, and pushing his hat a little back from his forehead supports his cheek on his hand. He remains thus a brief time in absorbed thought. Slowly he straightens himself and with lingering backward glances, goes out.

Again for a few brief moments the stage is empty.

Reënter Major Faring and Peter Taggart.

Scene VI

Major Faring—(*Drawing a deep sighing breath.*) I tell you, we've done a good morning's work, Peter. If it only ends as well as it has begun, you will have no complaint to make. (*By the aid of his cane moves heavily across the room into a chair.*)

Taggart—I'm well satisfied. (*Raising his voice.*) Hello! Where's everybody? Pleione, have you run away?

Reënter Mrs. Nearing, wearing a trim tailor-made street gown.

Mrs. Nearing—I've just got around and changed my dress.

Taggart—Have you got your duds together?

MRS. NEARING—Everything is packed and in my trunk.

TAGGART—Good. We've had some strenuous work this morning, the Major and I, trying to get wind of a sky pilot.

MRS. NEARING—Of a what?

TAGGART—Domine—parson—minister of the gospel.

MRS. NEARING—Your want of respect for sacred things is shocking!

TAGGART—You'll soon reform me, but to my story. We entered into the first hotel we ran up against and got the 'phone directory and called up half a dozen of their reverences, and it just seemed downright impossible to get access to a blamed one of the gentry. This one, we learned from wife or servant, had gone out of town, that one was on some business down in the city, another was out motoring or officiating at a funeral, or enjoying some other function, filling an engagement to lunch, or what not. Well, after the sixth trial of these domines, our luck changed, for the Reverend Munkewitz was home and himself answered my call and signified himself as not averse to the business of making us man and wife.

MRS. NEARING—The Reverend what did I understand you to say?

TAGGART—The Reverend Munkewitz, I said. To be more explicit, the Reverend Simeon Munkewitz.

MRS. NEARING—(*Sinking into a chair.*) Oh, my dear Peter, will not that awful name be likely to prove an evil omen to our marriage?

TAGGART—Certainly not. That's rank superstition, Pleione.

MRS. NEARING—(*Faintly.*) When is this Reverend —this—er—clergyman to perform the ceremony?

TAGGART—Right now. He's at the parsonage waiting for us and we've got an automobile outside to take us there.

MRS. NEARING—Oh, it's too precipitate altogether!

MAJOR FARING—Don't you think it! Mind this, Pleione, my girl, when you can find a parson in this big wilderness of a place, you want to clamp him down quick. Evidently there isn't much need of 'em here, for they aren't lyin' around loose, as they are at home, ready at hand at all seasons.

MRS. NEARING—This Babylon is given over to the devices of Satan.

TAGGART—A Bedlam to the devices of Beelzebub. Come, get your things on.

MRS. NEARING—And the license—have you got the license?

TAGGART—(*Drawing a paper from his breast.*) Here is the document. Fill out a few of these questions, will you, Pleione? (*Hands her his fountain pen.*) Tell the State how old you are.

MRS. NEARING—(*Belligerently.*) I'll tell no one how old I am! (*Glancing over the paper.*) If I've got to answer that, I back out! I refuse to get married!

TAGGART—Oh, nonsense!

MRS. NEARING—It's a perfect nuisance that a couple can't get married without being forced to turn inside out their entire private history that is no one's concern save their own.

TAGGART—(*Jocosely.*) Vital statistics, Pleione.

MRS. NEARING—It's no one's business but mine! Why should I be made to commit myself as to age in black and white? Sooner than answer such an impudent question, I'll quit.

TAGGART—(*Jestingly.*) Well, juggle it a little.

MRS. NEARING—Oh, that wouldn't be honest! I couldn't deliberately tell an untruth. And they could take me up for false affirmation, couldn't they?

TAGGART—(*With counterfeited gravity.*) When they found it out they probably would annul the marriage altogether, confiscate your property and clap you in prison for life. What do you care about putting your age on that paper? Those who see it neither know nor indeed ever before heard of you or me.

MRS. NEARING—I wasn't bothered with such pesky things as licenses when I married my first husband.

TAGGART—Never mind him.

MRS. NEARING—(*Testily and beginning to write.*) The loafers we keep up at Albany must have something to show in order to give some little account of their time, I suppose, hence this precious document.

TAGGART—Where's Irene?

MRS. NEARING—Oh, Irene's busy! She won't let me go into the dining-room. I imagine she is preparing some kind of a surprise for us.

MAJOR FARING—Where's my grandson?

MRS. NEARING—(*Still writing.*) I haven't seen him since you went away. He isn't with Irene and so he must have gone.

TAGGART—Never mind, Major. You will act as witness and we can call downtown to his office for Joe.

IRENE'S VOICE—Sister Pleione, why don't you get married in your own house, instead of going off to some strange place?

MRS. NEARING—(*Shortly.*) Because it isn't my house!

TAGGART—A parsonage is just as well, and the atmosphere perhaps a little more hallowed.

MRS. NEARING—(*Handing him the document and his pen.*) Peter, my first husband never indulged in such unbecoming jests.

TAGGART—Bother him! Forget it! Now go and get your things on, Pleione. We mustn't keep the Reverend Munkewitz waiting.

Exit Mrs. Nearing.

MAJOR FARING—It does beat all, if wimmin ain't the most curious contradictory creatures! I've lived with one steady over and above fifty years an' I ain't solved the puzzle yet.

TAGGART—Because they are so unexpected they baffle you at every turn. They are always springing a surprise on a chap. Would you dream a sensible mature woman like Pleione, now, would balk on her age or even give a hang who was wise to it, when if she stops to think a minute, she must know that all of us can figure it pretty close within a year or so.

MAJOR FARING—They are all alike on that matter, from the college misses, who have regular mutinies with the census men, to the female of uncertain years with false teeth and gray hairs. Bless you, the maturer they are the more sensitive they grow! One would suppose it was a crime to add experience to one's life, which alone gives any real value to it. Now

there is my Letitia. She was seventy-four last August, and do you think she wants any reference made about it? No siree! She's as touchy on that question as any girl gittin' past the marketable age. She's always tellin' about Mrs. Jones an' Mrs. Smith bein' so many years older than she, an' that this an' that there thing happened when she was the tiniest little slip of a girl, so that she has just a dim recollection of it. It's remarkable, Peter. You can't hardly conceive of their strange quirks an' their inconsistencies, you bein' a bachelor without much practical acquaintance with 'em. But now you will have opportunity to find out a few soon enough.

Reënter Mrs. Nearing in outdoor wrappings, wearing a stylish long coat of navy blue, a small modish hat of blue with an aigrette, and a veil, and with fur stole and large muff.

MRS. NEARING—(*Glancing from one to the other.*) I'm ready. (*Sighs deeply.*) Well, I am about out of breath, hurrying so.

TAGGART—(*Rising.*) You deserve a compliment for being so prompt, but then, you always do everything on time without any fuss. (*Regarding her approvingly.*) How nice you look! (*Approaches her.*)

MRS. NEARING—(*Evading him with a primly coquettish air.*) Don't on any account touch me and disarrange my hat or I won't look well for the ceremony.

TAGGART—I want you to look your tip-top best. Well, come, Major.

Exeunt the three, Major Faring going first and Taggart following, escorting Mrs. Nearing, his hand on her arm.

Reënter Longworthy from an inner door. He is ready to go out, and wears a long, closely-buttoned ulster that accentuates his height and noble proportions. He carries a suit case. He passes swiftly through the room and to the outer door.

IRENE'S VOICE—(*In silvery accents.*) Is that you, Cecil? Have you brought the ribbon? I am waiting for it. (*Longworthy stops short with his hand on the door-knob and stands motionless.*)

IRENE'S VOICE—(*In caroling, joyous crescendo.*) Ce-cil! Why don't you answer? (*Enter Irene, with neck craned around to one side, her efforts concentrated on hooking the back of her rose crepe de chine gown.*)

SCENE VII

IRENE—It seems to me you're pretty slow for a squire of dames, Mister. I have been on the jump every minute since you left and I began worrying you had forgotten. (*Petulantly.*) I give it up; I just can't do it alone! (*She raises her eyes. In a changed voice.*) Oh, it's *you!* Where did you come from?

LONGWORTHY—From our—the bedroom, where I've been gathering up a few things. Here, let me do that. (*He removes his gloves and begins hooking the back with slow, difficult fingers.*)

IRENE—I didn't know you were in the house. Why, how your fingers fumble!

LONGWORTHY—Do they? They're so big.

IRENE—But never clumsy like this. (*Her eyes fall on the suit case.*) Where are you going?

LONGWORTHY—To take the train.

IRENE—Not now?

LONGWORTHY—Yes.

IRENE—But you said you would return to see your sister off.

LONGWORTHY—(*Quietly.*) I concluded not. You will tell her I was called suddenly away on very important business, in truth to take charge of this mining corporation's interests, and she will not be offended.

IRENE—And you were going without saying good-by to me, indeed, without my knowing it?

LONGWORTHY—It seemed best. I left a note for you on the dresser, Irene, explaining my intentions toward you. I will now tell you the gist of what it contained. I have had a brief interview with Saxson, Margrave and Company, my lawyers, and bankers, and talked this matter over with the senior partner and with the result I have left everything in their hands and they will communicate with you very soon. I go Far West. This is the way it has been roughly arranged. I go Far West without consulting you or without your knowledge of my destination. After an interval of waiting, and of not hearing from me, you will file a petition for divorce on the grounds of my desertion of you. It will be necessary, if I understand rightly, for you to go over the State line either into New Jersey or Pennsylvania to take up your residence. These attorneys will direct your moves and endeavor to have you spared as much as possible of annoyance and publicity. If you choose to bring your action to New Jersey, after you have resided there two years, your suit can be brought up before the Court of Chancery; if you elect Pennsylvania, you can apply

for your divorce after one year's residence. But in either of these States you will not get your decree under two years following my desertion. You can save tedious delay by going West; Dakota and Nevada divorces, however, are not held in much esteem. In any case, your cause of action being sufficient, eventually you will get your bill and attain to your complete freedom. You are to retain the furniture of these apartments, also you will have clear your father's house in Odysseus. And in addition, I have arranged to settle some property on you that will ensure you a modest financial independence. That is all, I believe. You see it is very simple.

IRENE—(*In a strained voice.*) Oh, yes, very simple!

LONGWORTHY—(*Consulting his watch.*) If I am to catch my train I must go. (*He picks up his suit case.*)

IRENE—There is no hurry. If you can't make that train, you can another, and when a man is going away forever from his wife he can afford the last time to spend a few minutes with her.

LONGWORTHY—(*With a wintry smile.*) But you are no longer my wife.

IRENE—True! I forgot. But you should, in common decency to your sister, stay here to the wedding collation. You don't know how lovely the table is going to look, Joe. I have thought out such a pretty color scheme—pink and green.

LONGWORTHY—(*Laconically.*) I cannot stay.

IRENE—One should put one's feelings aside at such a time. You will spoil the entire party, and your poor

sister so many years getting married to the man she loves!

LONGWORTHY—I am sorry, but you will explain how I was called suddenly away. (*Turns to the door.*)

IRENE—(*In a low voice.*) And you are not even going to kiss me good-by when you expect never to see me again! It's unlike you to be so unthinking of me.

(*Longworthy looks at her, pauses irresolutely, then setting down his suit case, strides to her and takes her by the shoulders. Holding her from him, he looks long in her eyes with a deep yearning tenderness; he puts back her hair from her brow, gazes at her again, and then with a sudden passion strains her to his breast; pressing back her head, he kisses her brow, her closed eyes, her lips. Releases her without a word.*)

IRENE—(*With quivering lips.*) If you loved me as you claimed you did, you could not bring yourself to go off like this. You could not bring your mind to exile yourself.

LONGWORTHY—It is because I love you that I am going off like this! It is because I believe that my withdrawal will conduce to your fullest happiness that I exile myself!

IRENE—You would wait a little, at least, to see how things are coming out.

LONGWORTHY—It is preposterous; out of the question for me to remain here when your affections, as you have confessed to me, are given to that young man to whom you are so near in age, with whom you share so much. I can see now how serious and irremediable a mistake it was on my part to have tried to bind you to an old prosaic chap who had so little in

common with your youth when you had had such scant opportunity to see and judge other men and to choose for yourself.

IRENE—You could not have shown such supreme coldness and indifference as you have done.

LONGWORTHY—Don't let's discuss my behavior. My God, am I a man of stone!

IRENE—You seem already aloof from me, to have withdrawn yourself,—so far away in spirit. Joe!

LONGWORTHY—(*With a supreme effort at self-possession.*) It is only because you do not know me. (*His lips quiver into a twisted smile.*) If you did, you would not reproach me thus.

IRENE—(*Passionately.*) If you had ever really truly cared for me as a strong man like you should care for a woman, you would not have relinquished me with so little ado. You would have striven for me! Yes, you would have fought as elemental men used to fight in the long ago to have and to hold the women they coveted!

LONGWORTHY—(*Gently.*) What do you want, my child?

IRENE—(*Bursting into wild tears.*) I want you to stay!

LONGWORTHY—Don't you see how impossible it is for me to stay?

IRENE—(*Unheeding.*) You will go off there in the woolly West where I will never see you any more and marry some other woman.

LONGWORTHY—But you will have no time to worry about such a contingency, because you will be so absorbed in your own husband and children.

IRENE—You can stay here and remain my friend.

LONGWORTHY—(*Gravely.*) I am always that, but I can serve you best by taking myself away.

IRENE—But to whom am I going for advice, who will direct me in emergency?

LONGWORTHY—When at any time you are in grave trouble or are in need, however far distant I may be, I will come to you, if I am living,—even from the ends of the earth. Now don't distress yourself any more grieving over what is done. . . Don't cry, little one, for it is more than I can bear. (*Cheerily.*) Bless me, it's almost train time now. I haven't a minute to spare! If I make it, Hanson will have to shave close on the speed laws! *Exit in haste.*

(*Irene remains several seconds glancing about her in a bewildered way. Then she rushes distractedly to the door, opens it.*

IRENE—(*Calling.*) Joe! (*Listens.*)

IRENE—(*In a voice of frenzied anguish.*) Joe! He's gone, he's gone! (*Comes back, flings herself on the couch and bursts into a tempest of wild sobbing, rocking back and forth. Unheeded by her, there sounds a ring of the bell, and shortly the maid enters bearing a large florist's box.*)

MAID—It was just left here by the florist's boy. (*Stops aghast.*) Why, Mrs. Longworthy, what has happened? Have you received bad news?

IRENE—Oh, nothing, nothing at all! (*Rising.*) I haven't any sort of news. Why, those must be the roses Mr. Keith has sent for the decoration. (*Opens the box and there are revealed four dozen of pink roses*

and a quantity of smilax. A small tissue parcel discloses the pink satin ribbon.)

MAID—(*With a cry of delight at sight of roses.*) Aren't they lovely—so fresh and fragrant! Oh, Mrs. Longworthy, isn't it a pity they must so soon perish!

IRENE—(*Tragically.*) Everything must soon perish, Nellie,—youth and beauty and with them love, all that makes life worth living! (*Picks up a card and reads.*) Compliments of Cecil Gordon Keith. Take them to the dining-room, Nellie, and I will be there directly.

Exit the maid.

Reënter Major Faring, Peter Taggart and Mrs. Pleione Nearing-Taggart.

MAJOR FARING—(*Heavily crossing the room by the aid of his cane.*) Well, the knot's tied; that's out of our systems an' I, for one, feel better, an' now we can get out of the tumult an' hubbub of this jammed-in Bedlam at the first opportunity. How do you feel, Peter; any different from usual?

TAGGART—I feel buoyant, Major, in the very tip-top of spirits, as a man should feel who has corralled every good thing this earth contains. I am as extravagantly, jubilantly happy as any mortal could ever hope to be.

MAJOR FARING—And how about you, Pleione?

MRS. PLEIONE NEARING-TAGGART—I am not as superlative as Peter, but I am very happy. (*Taggart kisses her cheek.*)

MAJOR FARING—That's right. Keep it up.

MRS. TAGGART—I shall do my part toward keeping it up. (*To Irene.*) Why, what's the matter with you,

child? You appear as woe-begone as though you'd lost your last friend.

IRENE—(*With an effort at indifference.*) Nothing is the matter.

MRS. TAGGART—You look as though you'd been crying your eyes out. Something must be the matter. (*To Taggart.*) It's strange we didn't find Joe at his office. It was up to him to keep within reach. When I saw him at the house whilst I was packing this morning and I told him I was to be married this afternoon, he promised he would be present at the ceremony. Where could he have been?

IRENE—He was here packing his things to go West. He said I was to tell you he was called suddenly away on important business.

MRS. TAGGART—(*Pursing her lips.*) It must have been of an extremely pressing nature! That's very queer that he should rush off at such a time as this without seeing me. It is not like him!

IRENE—He said that I was to explain how he was called suddenly away and you would not be offended.

MRS. TAGGART—(*With asperity.*) But I am offended that he should show so little respect to his only living sister to whom he has always been so devoted, as to leave here so unceremoniously on the greatest occasion of her life. Where did you say he was going?

IRENE—He was going West to that mining corporation place.

MRS. TAGGART—(*Sharply.*) But where—what locality?

IRENE—(*Vaguely.*) Why—er—Indiana.

MRS. TAGGART—(*With growing sharpness.*)

There aren't any mines in Indiana that I ever heard of. What are you talking about?

IRENE—Oklahoma—Seattle—— (*Bursts into tears.*) My head aches, I don't remember where it was he was going.

TAGGART—(*To Mrs. Taggart.*) Don't torment her with questions. Can't you see she is all broken up by his leaving?

MRS. TAGGART—(*Persisting.*) That shouldn't prevent her from knowing his destination.

TAGGART—Never mind. We'll all know in good time.

MAJOR FARING—Now I think about it, it seems to me mighty funny Cecil doesn't show up here.

TAGGART—(*Jocosely.*) You can't keep track of young chaps. Their goings and their comings are not reducible to the laws of calculation, for they are as uncertain as the changes of the weather.

MRS. TAGGART—And think, in their conceit, that the fate of the world hangs on those goings and comings.

IRENE—I assure you he will be here shortly, for he knows a surprise I have planned for you.

MRS. TAGGART—(*In affected wonder.*) You have planned a surprise?

IRENE—Yes, something very novel.

TAGGART—We are all curiosity.

IRENE—You'll know in a very few minutes what it is. (*Rises. A knock sounds on the door immediately followed by the entrance of a strange gentleman.*)

Scene VIII

Strange Gentleman—(*Advancing and looking from one to another.*) Is Mrs. Longworthy here?

Irene—(*With startled glance.*) I am Mrs. Longworthy.

Strange Gentleman—I am sorry to be the messenger of bad news, madam, but it is imperative you know it. Your husband's automobile, in making a sharp curve, going at a high rate of speed, collided with another car and the impact was of such force as to hurl your husband and his chauffeur through the wind-shield violently to the pavement. (*Mrs. Taggart emits a gasping cry.*)

Strange Gentleman—I beg you not to be too much alarmed, ladies. Whilst Mr. Longworthy is stunned by the shock of the fall and cut by the broken glass, I do not think his injuries, though severe, are of a vital nature.

Irene—(*With her hand pressed to her heart, and speaking in a quiet, controlled voice.*) Where is he?

Strange Gentleman—I brought him in my own car and men are assisting him here. (*Goes to the door and motions.*)

Enter two men supporting Longworthy on each side, who is dragged slowly and heavily along. His face is bruised and blood-stained, his eyes are wide open and stare unseeingly ahead. His ulster is draggled and torn. They bring him to the couch and with much effort and difficulty lift and lay him down upon it.

Irene moves quickly forward and bends over him. Mechanically he raises his hand to his head, groans

deeply and sinks into unconsciousness.

MRS. TAGGART—(*In a low voice.*) I will get water and bathe his poor face.

Exit Mrs. Taggart hurriedly.

(*Taggart speaks a few words to the strange man.*)

Exeunt the three.

(*Irene goes upon her knees beside the couch, unbuttons Longworthy's ulster and removes the gloves from his hands.*)

IRENE—(*In a low, supplicating voice.*) Joe!

(*Longworthy, opening his eyes, looks at her strangely a moment and then slowly the light of recognition dawns in them.*)

IRENE—Joe, dearest, it is I, your little one, your Irene.

LONGWORTHY—(*With a faint smile.*) My best girl! (*A spasm of pain contracts his brow and he closes his eyes again.*)

Reënter Mrs. Taggart with a basin of warm water.

(*She unloosens his collar, smooths back his hair and tenderly washes the blood from his bruised face. Then she rises and talks aside with Taggart and the Major. Irene, still on her knees, lightly strokes Longworthy's brow and presses her lips humbly again and again to his toil-worn hand. He stirs and groans.*)

IRENE—(*Slowly and distinctly.*) I want my husband. I want him only—I want him always. Do you know who it is saying this, Joe?

LONGWORTHY—(*Trying to smile.*) It is you . . . little bride. . . . (*Makes a slight movement to draw her to him, murmurs some inaudible words and lapses*

again into unconsciousness.)

MRS. TAGGART—(*Clasping and unclasping her hands.*) Oh, I wish the doctor those men called would get here!

(*Taggart restlessly moves about the room. Irene remains bent over Longworthy.*)

A sharp ring of the bell sounds.

Taggart opens the door and returns with a letter.

TAGGART—A messenger with this special delivery letter. (*Examining the address.*) It is directed to Longworthy.

MRS. TAGGART—Then you have my permission to open it. Being a special, it must be of urgent importance and he would wish us to know its contents in order to act for him if necessary. It probably relates to this mysterious trip he was in such wild haste to make.

TAGGART—(*To Irene.*) Shall we open this letter, Irene? (*Irene, stroking Longworthy's brow and murmuring softly to him, unheeds.*)

MRS. TAGGART—I take the responsibility.

(*Taggart tears open the envelope and there falls to the floor a slip of folded paper. Reads aloud.*)

Mr. Joel Longworthy,

MY DEAR SIR:

I feel that there is just one man in ten thousand men who possesses the heroism that would make possible an act of such supreme renunciation as yours of this morning. When the truth was disclosed to me then for the first time of what I owe you, when the knowledge was impressed upon my mind then for the first

time of the immense obligations under which you have placed me for my man's chance, my highest opportunities in the world, it took only little reflection to bring home to me the impossibility of accepting a sacrifice on your part that would have convicted me in my own conscience of the basest ingratitude.

Whilst I realize the futility of making adequate repayment of a debt of such magnitude, I have hope to make at least a measure of return to you by showing you through the winning of success and perhaps even some notable achievement, that your generous benefactions have not been thrown away and that I am both able and desirous to do credit to your efforts in my behalf.

I am apprised through this morning's mail that I have secured one of the University positions which I was seeking, and I am starting for the Far West to enter directly upon its duties. You will find enclosed the amount of this month's allowance. I have enough means through the sale of some poems and an article in one of the magazines to defray the expenses of my journey.

Thanking you for all past favors and assuring you of my fixed intention to prove myself worthy of your patronage, I remain, sir,

With deepest respect,

CECIL GORDON KEITH.

MRS. TAGGART—Ah, I begin to get the threads of this tangle!

MAJOR FARING—What's that? (*Stoops and picks up the folded slip.*) A check to Joe Longworthy.

What's my boy sending checks to him for?

TAGGART—You don't understand, Kit. It's the last allowance made your grandson through Saxson, Margrave and Company, returned to Joe with Cecil's endorsement.

MAJOR FARING—(*In bewilderment.*) But I'm all at sea! What's this talk in the boy's letter about obligations an' benefactions an' favors? Do you mean me to understand that the man behind Saxson, Margrave an' Company is Joel Longworthy?

TAGGART—Exactly that.

MAJOR FARING—Do you mean me to understand that it is he who has been educatin' my boy all these years?

TAGGART—None other!

MAJOR FARING—Such a thought never entered my head! By heaven, but I am confounded! Why in the name of all mystery should he do it?

IRENE—Because he wanted to show his appreciation of your kindness to his father in time of need.

MAJOR FARING—Well—I'll—be—jiggered!

IRENE—(*In a voice of restrained joy.*) Oh, sister Pleione, I felt a feeble pressure on my hand! He is coming back. He will not leave me!

(*A quick imperative ring sounds.*)

MRS. TAGGART—Thank God, the doctor!

Curtain

THE SUPREME TEST

A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ORESSA HOLLIDAY.....*A Woman of Genius*
MR. BENN HOLLIDAY.....*Oressa's Father*
MRS. BENN HOLLIDAY.....*Oressa's Mother*
VIRGINIA HOLLIDAY..... ....*Oressa's Sister*

Members of
Parnassus Circle

ARMAND DUQUET.....*Playwright and Idealist*
CARROLL LEAVENWORTH..... *Playwright*
DUNCAN MACLACHLAN.....*Dramatic Critic*
EUGENE DAVIES.....*Novelist*

A PARNASSIAN
ANOTHER PARNASSIAN
FLOSSIE DUQUET.....*Ingénue*
ALMON MERRITT.....*Oressa's Quondam Fiancé*
WILLETTS .....*Duquet's Footman*
MAID TO ORESSA

ACT I—*Living room in Holliday house.*

ACT II—*Study in Duquet's New York Apartments.*

ACT III—*Parlor in Oressa Holliday's New York Apartments.*

ACT IV—*Same as Act I.*

Act I has four scenes, Act II has three scenes, Act III has six scenes, Act IV has four scenes.

THE SUPREME TEST

ACT I

Living room in Holliday house.

The room, dimly lighted, has faded Brussels carpet on the floor, old-fashioned furniture, with horsehair sofa, dilapidated chairs whose webbing is broken and insides protruding. In the center is a round table covered with a worsted spread and littered with books and newspapers. A lamp, low burning, is placed in the middle of the table.

Time—Seven o'clock, of October evening.

Mrs. Holliday, a careworn woman of sixty, attired in an ill-fitting gown of rusty black, her shoulders covered with a shawl, is seated in a large rocking-chair with split cane back.

Enter Holliday, a man of seventy. He is spare, tall and stooped, with an ascetic visage, white mustache and hair.

Scene I

Holliday—(*In querulous tones.*) It is a crime, the way you women waste light in this house! Here I find the gas up full head in the front hall. I sup-

pose it's some of Virginia's doings. Girls have no economy in them. They'd run me into bankruptcy if I'd let 'em.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—We try to be as saving as we can, and we use kerosene oil in the kitchen.

HOLLIDAY—(*With an impatient gesture.*) Kerosene oil in the kitchen! What's that when the meter has already registered eight hundred feet! At the rate we're going we shall consume this month over a thousand feet! Eight hundred feet, and this only the third week!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Eight hundred feet? What would that make the bill?

HOLLIDAY—It would make it one dollar and ten cents, madam.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—What of that? Suppose we did burn eight hundred feet?

HOLLIDAY—There is no sense in it. It's just a wilful extravagance.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—But, Benn, this is a dark month and we have to light up early.

HOLLIDAY—It isn't near as dark as it will be in the next two months. If we begin by burning a thousand feet in October, what will we burn in November and December, I should like to know? Why should I pay for gas burning full head in that hall when it does nobody any good?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Beginning to rock.*) I'd be decent if I lived in a community amongst civilized folks. I'd have a little pride for my family's sake if not for my own, and I'd show a ray of light in my house for the speech of people!

HOLLIDAY—(*Excitedly.*) That's all you think of. It's your fetich. You are eternally bound down by what people will think. Damn it! what do I care what they think! I declare, Beulah, I'd have some independence!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—If any one should start to come here, they'd go away when they saw it so dark, because they naturally would think nobody was home.

HOLLIDAY—(*Belligerently.*) Then let 'em go away. I tell you, right here, I am not going to waste light in my house in order to squander my hard earnings on this swindling gas company. Why should I help enrich such a concern?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Rocking to and fro.*) It isn't to enrich the gas company; it's for our own comfort, Benn.

HOLLIDAY—Nonsense! What comfort are we getting out of that light running to waste in the front hall?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—But it isn't any better where we are sitting.

HOLLIDAY—You aren't reading. There is light enough here to talk by. What more do you want than to see ourselves? Don't be unreasonable.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It is so cheerless.

HOLLIDAY—(*Angrily.*) You women are dissatisfied because I won't expend my income on foolishness.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—If I were you, I wouldn't want Oressa to look back and always remember her home as a place of stinting economies, and how to the very last her father pinched her down to the barest necessities.

HOLLIDAY—As to that, Oressa has had a good home here with us and it remains to be seen if she finds any better with Merritt.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—If it weren't for the sake of her marrying, I would certainly put my foot down on her having that man.

HOLLIDAY—Mrs. Earle's croaking!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I do not think he's the right man for her. To begin with, he's too practical. The idea of a girl like Oressa, brimming over with sentiment, marrying a man who lays out sewers and builds coffer dams! It's incongruous, to say the least.

HOLLIDAY—It's a good thing for girls to marry their opposites.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I think there ought to be some affinity, anyway.

HOLLIDAY—You can't have everything.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—She ought to marry a man who will enter into her tastes for refined things, who will encourage her.

HOLLIDAY—You women ought to make men to order, so as to be suited in every respect. Have their noses a definite length, their eyes a certain color, their figures a stated height, and their tastes and ways of looking at everything to exactly correspond with yours. And if they differ an iota from that standard, throw 'em out because they are not fitted for you!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You can laugh. That's a woman's privilege to choose in order to suit herself. I ought, on general principles, to oppose this marriage.

HOLLIDAY—Much good it would do you, when she has got her head set.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—She thinks she's in love with him because she has not had any others with whom to compare him. She hardly ever meets, let alone gets a chance to become acquainted with a man, and he just happens to be the one who is available. Her head is full of romance. She lives in an unreal world; she is in love with the idea of love and she is at that age when she wants an object on which to lavish her affection.

HOLLIDAY—Then let her have the experience. Perhaps it won't turn out as badly as you apprehend.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Shaking her head.*) Though generous, she is high-strung and wilful, and he is obstinate and domineering, and I sometimes fear his principles are not stable; and he never has been nice and attentive to you and me as a young man should be to the parents of the girl with whom he aims to be solid. I have warned her that if he couldn't make her dearest friend happy he wouldn't very likely prove a good husband to her.

HOLLIDAY—That doesn't follow at all. Because a man can't get along with one woman who may be a spendthrift, a gad-about or a nag, is no sign he won't with another who is economical and stay-at-home.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Louise lived a life of misery and died a disappointed, broken-hearted woman.

HOLLIDAY—Mrs. Earle has prejudiced you with her yarns about her girl.

MRS. HOLIDAY—Natural enough. Still I never liked him from the first, when he began coming around here with his smooth talk of how much she reminded

him of his lost wife, how vividly she brought back the dear days of his courtship, Oressa being so much at Louise's and bridesmaid, and what a consolation it was to him to be with one who could sympathize with him. (*Wags her head.*) I know about what that sort of talk is worth and what its object is. Soon enough I saw how things were going, that he was making up to her and that she was carried away by the idea of a beau and I was in the dumps, as you well remember. I distrusted him from the beginning and I believe that under that outside he has a mean disposition. No mother could tell the things Mrs. Earle told me with tears in her eyes unless some truth were behind them. Louise was thwarted in everything she wanted to do.

HOLLIDAY—Bah! We all know Louise had an ungovernable temper.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—So has Oressa a passionate temper.

HOLLIDAY—Then it will be a good thing to have her impetuosity curbed a bit.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*With spirit.*) Do you mean me to understand, Mr. Holliday, that you want your daughter to be miserable?

HOLLIDAY—Certainly not. But a little disciplining and keeping in check for girls now-a-days when they are become so headstrong and think they are running the world, isn't altogether a bad idea. And I am not much worried about Oressa's ability to hold her own.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—When a woman holds her own against a domineering man there is war to the knife. Of course, situated as she is, I couldn't deliberately set myself to breaking up the match, when it is likely

to be the only opportunity the child will have. What chance has she here and what is there for her to do? What does the future hold for her save to go to seed as her poor sister has done?

HOLLIDAY—Then let good enough alone.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I often feel it was a mistake on our side that we did not make a supreme effort to send the girls to college where they might have met nice young men. That's where Louise Earle became acquainted with Merritt.

HOLLIDAY—It was the tightest kind of a squeeze for me to send my boys to college.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—We could have borrowed the money.

HOLLIDAY—It was against my principles. I never felt the necessity for my girls to chase the country over after fellows. I have always been of the belief that a woman should be sought and that an attractive girl can get a husband if she stays home.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—So she might, if desirable men folks are about where she can get access to them. But the right kind of husbands are scarce these days. You know that, Benn, well enough.

HOLLIDAY—You didn't have to go to college to get *me*.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Significantly.*) Perhaps it might have been well for myself and the girls if I had gone.

HOLIDAY—(*Sarcastically.*) Perhaps.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I doubtless would have made a different choice.

HOLLIDAY—Very doubtless.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It's too late now, after forty years, to talk of what might have been. Now I have told you of my apprehensions regarding this marriage. Merritt has been a long time urging Oressa to set the day. It has been a year since Louise died and the conventions have been sufficiently observed. Oressa, too, has got tired of waiting.

HOLLIDAY—Well, let 'em get married. What's hindering them?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—A trousseau.

HOLLIDAY—What!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Calmly.*) Yes, a trousseau. She has decided on early December and she has got to have some decent clothes. Of course, she will not go into any save the plainest wardrobe and she will be married in a very simple unpretentious way, but it is absolutely necessary she have a wedding gown, a traveling suit, a new coat and hat and a theater dress. And there will have to be money provided for that.

HOLLIDAY—How much?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You will have to give us two hundred dollars at least.

HOLLIDAY—Phew! Come, now, you needn't tell me it's necessary a girl squander all that good money on wedding finery.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Persuasively.*) That is a very small amount to spend these days on an outfit.

HOLLIDAY—Small amount! Why, when we were married you only had one dress, the dress you had on when you stood up and which you still wore afterward when we took our wedding trip by carriage of thirty miles!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—That was so long ago and everything was so different. You could only afford a gold engagement ring costing five dollars or less! Your daughter is marrying a professional man in prosperous circumstances and you want her to do credit to her position in life. You don't want her to go to her husband without a decent wardrobe and it is a time in which we can't be niggardly.

HOLLIDAY—I can't let you have it. It is impossible.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Why do you say that when I know that you made the sale only last month of that twenty acres up in Freetown you took so long ago on a mortgage?

HOLLIDAY—So I did, but I had to let Edmond have the money to tide him over from that business speculation that turned out so disastrously.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Edmond should get out of that without distressing us. Here you derive a very tiny income from your securities and he is earning over three thousand a year! It's enough, surely, for any man who uses common thrift, to take care of himself and family on. It is preposterous he should apply to you when he meets with reverses. He is reckless and you know it.

HOLLIDAY—I do; but I am sure just as soon as he can he will pay me back my loan. Meanwhile, I couldn't let him suffer for the need of a few hundred.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Haven't you any other available resources?

HOLLIDAY—Not at present. I had to meet my taxes, my insurance dues and outstanding bills, and it left only enough by closest economy to run through the

winter without drawing on my reserve capital.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Then I shall be obliged to sell my railroad bond. The child has just got to have some clothes. It isn't necessary you tell her that the money doesn't come from you.

HOLLIDAY—Later I will try and pay you back.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Tossing her head.*) I know about the paying back!

HOLLIDAY—You know that since Harvey's savings have given out, it has crowded me pretty close to send him checks every month.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—He shouldn't have attempted taking a degree abroad without sufficient funds to carry him through.

HOLLIDAY—I never saw such a contradictory woman! Here it was yourself who urged his taking a second degree as absolutely necessary if he ever hoped to get into university work, and now you are finding fault because I am trying to help him a little!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I supposed, of course, he had saved enough after teaching five years on a good salary of twelve hundred a year to finance this undertaking without falling back on you.

HOLLIDAY—(*With warmth.*) I am only too glad to be of service to him, as any man would be who feels a fatherly interest in his son. Harvey is the most likely member of our family, who will do it the greatest credit. Do you for an instant suppose, now that he is almost ready to take his degree, I am going to let him lose out for the sake of a few paltry dollars? No, ma'am! I am going to stand by to the last minute!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Sh! Sh! Benn! Here come the girls.

Enter, arm in arm, Virginia Holliday, a spinister of thirty-seven, and Oressa Holliday, a maid of twenty-five. Oressa's hair is hanging in a big braid down her back. Both girls are slender and graceful.

ORESSA—(*Lightly.*) We've got the dishes done, mommy.

VIRGINIA—(*Stopping short.*) Ugh! How cold it is here!

HOLLIDAY—There you go again! I don't believe there ever were such chronic fault-finders as my women folks. Everything I do, I get kicked. It is impossible to please you. Some day, when you don't have me here to abuse, you'll look back and miss me!

VIRGINIA—Ooh—ooh!

HOLLIDAY—You exaggerate, make a great ado about nothing, let your imagination run away with you. It may be a trifle chilly, but it is not *cold!*

VIRGINIA—(*Protestingly.*) It is, it is cruelly cold, pa. And it is dangerous for mamma, since having that awful attack of grip last winter, to sit in a room without heat. (*To Mrs. Holliday.*) You better go in the kitchen, ma, where there is a fire.

HOLLIDAY—Then off to the kitchen, all of you, as fast as you can foot it! I can stand a little drop in temperature and am the better for it. Over-heated rooms are debilitating to mind as well as body, a menace to health. I am not going to saddle myself with the care of that furnace before the first of November.

VIRGINIA—As to that, you know I stand willing to help you.

HOLLIDAY—Oh, yes! (*Wags his head.*) Of course you stand willing to empty my coal bin before there is the slightest necessity to begin on it. It has never been my custom to start fires before the first of November, and I am not going to break the rule. Come, you effeminate, soft-fibered people of this puling generation, who haven't stamina enough to bear a little discomfort in mild October weather, how do you think you could have endured an orthodox New York State winter fifty, sixty years ago, on a farm, with only two little wood stoves to heat the whole house?

VIRGINIA—Ugh!

HOLLIDAY—And folks in those days went to bed in a room that even in extremest mid-winter never received the least heat and considered it no hardship, either. In fact, they thought nothing of it, even when sometimes in the morning they found a little blanket of snow spread over them that in a heavy wind had sifted through the crevices of the walls and roof.

ORESSA—Oh, for goodness' sake, pa.

HOLLIDAY—Yes, so. And that was the sort of life,—simple, hardy, abstemious,—that gave men backbone and constitution and made the vigor and solidity of this country. Why, a dollar was a dollar in those times, and men worked to earn it and valued it as a precious possession when they obtained it! Many a day when I was a boy have I toiled with bent back and sweating brow from sun-up to sunset, picking stones in the field for twenty-five cents, and proud was I of my labor! Such things as an eight-hour day, unions, strikes, labor troubles and men disgruntled

with their jobs and stirring up dissensions, weren't within my experience.

When I was in my teens and taught in the country, I walked four and six miles through the mud of wet weather, plowed through the snow-drifts of winter, to my school. Later, when I was so fortunate as to teach in the village academy, I eked out my tiny salary by working nights and mornings in the grocery store. And when first I moved here I was glad to support my family at book-keeping on six hundred a year. I know how I have come by my savings. I gained my way by my own efforts, accomplished my success unaided. I was without trade, profession, higher education; against that lack, I pitted my energy and determined to win out as best I could. Those were primitive times that made for resolution and character.

Oressa—But since then conditions have changed from simple to complex, and moderns have developed a thousand needs to the one of the old-fashioned men and women who were perfectly content with the elementals of life.

Holliday—I don't believe people are a whit more contented or happy for all the creature comforts and luxuries, and this is manifest—the mode of life prevailing now is not bringing out any very extraordinary personalities.

Virginia—Your philosophy, pa, is of the Spartan order, and we, by inclination, at any rate, are of the Epicurean school.

Holliday—This Epicurean philosophy that devotes men's powers to the service of sensual indulgence has

bred a race of pygmies.

ORESSA—You are a strong adherent of Henry David Thoreau and you think we moderns are deteriorating, as he thought were the people of his day when from the wilderness he raised his voice against sensual tendencies. (*Starts, as the clang of the front door bell is heard.*) Is that the bell?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Yes, and I suppose the hall is dark as a pocket.

VIRGINIA—I'll go.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Turn up the gas before you open the door.

Exit Virginia.

ORESSA—Anyway, we can have a little more light here. (*Turns up the lamp.*) There, that's more cheerful. (*Runs to her mother and straightens out the white lace collar at her throat. Smooths her hair.*) Now we are fit as fiddles. (*Folds her arms and strikes an attitude.*) I suppose it's that botheration of a Madam Jaundice come to whine out her troubles in our long-suffering ears. Oh, the old bore!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Perhaps it's Mr. Merritt come to see you.

ORESSA—He would have telegraphed, for it isn't his custom to come unawares. That man does everything with method and in order. It would be embarrassing for us if his advent should chance to be unheralded. He'd surely think he got a freeze-out, eh, pa?

HOLLIDAY—You could take him to the kitchen.

ORESSA—Where it is general for wenches to receive their followers.

Reënter Virginia, followed by a tall, distinguished

appearing young man bearing his hat and a small parcel in one hand. As he walks there is a noticeable peculiarity of his head, which is bent slightly forward.

Scene II

Stranger—(*Advancing.*) Miss Oressa Holliday?

Oressa—(*Inclining her head.*) Yes.

Stranger—I am Armand Duquet. (*Lays down his hat and parcel and takes from his breast pocket a case, from which he extracts a card. Hands her the card.*)

Oressa—(*Putting out her hand.*) This is a great and unexpected pleasure, Mr. Duquet. I am deeply honored by your coming here. (*Shows confusion.*) I feel very much gratified at your coming here. It is a great surprise, I assure you. I expect you think me very presumptuous to take the liberty I did in addressing you, and now I seriously fear I have imposed upon you. I certainly do, you know.

Duquet—(*Lightly and speaking with a marked Southern accent.*) Don't worry about that a moment. I am on my way West from New York to transact a little business in Chicago and it is the easiest thing in the world for me to stop off here. Right on my road.

Oressa—It is nice of you to say that, and it is nicer for you to come. Mr. Duquet, allow me to present you to my family,—my father, mother and sister.

Duquet—(*With a brilliant smile.*) I am sure

I am happy to meet them. (*Bows low. Shakes hands cordially with each one in turn.*)

ORESSA—Mr. Duquet's is a name of which you have all heard. It is that of one of our most distinguished American playwrights.

DUQUET—(*Bowing low.*) You are superlative in your estimate of my rank.

HOLLIDAY—The name sounds foreign.

DUQUET—I am of French descent, suh. I was born and partially reared in the South, where my family, for many generations, have lived.

ORESSA—If you can't be of the native-born French, who carry the palm for exquisite urbanity, the next best thing is to have emanated from the South, famed the world over as the home of chivalry, and we might also add, where are lodged the gentility and high breeding of this country.

(*The ladies seat themselves, and Duquet takes his place on the hair-cloth sofa.*)

DUQUET—(*Smiling.*) You pay gracious homage to the South.

ORESSA—I only say what I honestly think.

HOLLIDAY—I suppose you have been abroad?

DUQUET—Yes, I have spent some years in study in Paris and Berlin. My grandfather was Ambassador to the Imperial German Court.

HOLLIDAY—(*Leaning forward.*) Berlin, you say? I have a son studying for a doctor's degree in Berlin.

DUQUET—Indeed, suh!

HOLLIDAY—Yes. My son received his Bachelor's training in this country, but he soon found out, he says, an American degree in the academic world didn't show

up very well alongside a foreign one. You know in these days, not anything is counted in the educational line as equal to what the Germans can put up. My son's admiration for that people is unbounded. They're scientific in their system, he says. Efficiency in every line, is their watchword,—and he is intending to devote himself to university work. His ambition is to become a professor and teach these methods to our young Philistines. And a man these days don't stand much chance at professoring unless he holds a German doctorate. The universities want the top-trained men.

DUQUET—Ah!

ORESSA—Harvey's business is to inculcate ideas whilst Mr. Duquet's is to originate them. Perhaps he is not so deeply impressed with the German educational predominance as we are.

DUQUET—Thorough equipment is indispensable to the scholar and it is a jewel in the crown of genius.

(*Fumbles in his breast pocket and produces a leather-monogramed case and extracts from the case several cigars with gilt bands around them. With a low bow proffers the cigars to Holliday.*)

HOLLIDAY—Oh, thank you, thank you! But I fear I am robbing you.

DUQUET—(*Graciously.*) I assure you, no.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I thought you'd given up smoking, Mr. Holliday.

HOLLIDAY—Well, I had, as an unnecessary and expensive practise, but when an acquaintance, for good-fellowship's sake, offers me Havanas, I am not churlish enough to refuse them.

ORESSA—(*Naïvely.*) I expected you to be middle-

aged and gray. I certainly did.

DUQUET—(*With a brilliant smile.*) And are you disappointed that I prove otherwise?

ORESSA—Disappointed? Er—I am amazed.

DUQUET—Why, is youth, then, so incompatible with achievement?

ORESSA—Why, no, when one recalls Keats, Shelley and Byron! But if I had supposed you not to be mature and sedate, I would not have dared apply to you.

DUQUET—"O'erlaid with black, staid Wisdom's hue." Perhaps I shall prove to possess great sobriety.

ORESSA—(*Laughing.*) Of judgment and steadfastness of purpose. (*Shaking her head.*) Ah, it never entered my head. It is incredible in so short a time you could accomplish so much!

DUQUET—You simply have overestimated my achievements.

ORESSA—Four dramas and a name already known the world over! Oh, no, no! (*To the others.*) You know I was bold enough to write to Mr. Duquet.

(*Holliday is fingering the cigars and taking deep whiffs of their fragrance.*)

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Write him!

ORESSA—Yes, to help me. I thought I might get some ideas from him that would prove of great value and that if I could enlist the interest of a man of authority and prestige in the dramatic world it would spur me on to a supreme effort. (*To Duquet.*) You have read my play?

DUQUET—Yes.

ORESSA—And what do you think of it?

DUQUET—Do you really wish me to tell you?

ORESSA—Certainly I do! I want your unvarnished opinion.

DUQUET—A candid opinion is not always so pleasant to the recipient as one disguised by polite circumlocutions.

ORESSA—I am an egoist by nature, but I do not shrink from the truth when it is going to be salutary for me. I must know, sooner the better, my faults and deficiencies in order to correct them. So do not hesitate to tell me.

DUQUET—It is your maiden effort?

ORESSA—I will have to confess there are several companions to it snugly reposing on a shelf in my closet. I have been impelled from the time I first remember with the desire to give shape to the fancies that were ever crowding in my brain, and as soon as I could grope my way to a sufficient use of the language as a medium of expression, I began to materialize my ideas into words. My continual joy was in creating situations; crude and feeble as were my efforts I was happy in giving novel and fresh forms to my imagination. I knew perfectly well, of course, that from a standpoint of utility these attempts were ineffective, but my pleasure was in the exercise. I cannot tell you how my being, isolated and apart, has been filled to overbrimming, like an effervescent glass of champagne, with the sparkling interests of these beautiful dreams and the perpetual surprise and delight of the fascinating mysteries surrounding me! I was always busy weaving my romances, and whatever might be the circumstances of my external life the inner one I led

was of glory and rapture. As I grew older, I became faintly conscious of the stirrings of innate power which grew stronger and stronger with the years, and gradually there dawned upon me a sense of personal responsibility. Then with the realization that I was born with a special part to play, that I was intrusted with a gift to be used for the service of mankind, I had before me an aim and a definite purpose. That aim and that purpose, ever growing more insistent, have become the guiding motives of my existence. My dearest wish is to succeed, because I am obsessed with the knowledge that to triumphantly work out the forces that control me is to fulfil the destiny for which I was ordained. And you can help me, who am still groping in the shadows and striving after the distant object, because you have surmounted your obstacles and reached the goal.

DUQUET—To help you to develop your potentialities and to know yourself, I accord both a privilege and a pleasure.

In reading your manuscript I was impressed with the conviction that it was written by one imbued with exalted ideals, animated by the impassioned fervor, the divine inspiration of youth, written by one untried and as yet spared the disappointment of losing her illusions, one who had lived long in the realms of glowing fancy, who had thought much, had roamed the wide fields of literature, but who, owing to the restrictions of a narrow and secluded environment, had missed almost entirely the realities of the world.

Observation, to the writer, is what information is to the student. Knowledge and discipline are the tools

with which the scholar works; experience is the servant of genius. It is still for you to learn of that broader life that comes from contact with men and affairs.

ORESSA—(*Eagerly.*) And the opportunity to learn will soon be granted me. I am coming out of the chrysalis right quick. In a very short time I shall be transported to city life, where I shall meet many people, have diversion, excitement and pleasure galore.

DUQUET—Very good. So far, your ideas have been evolved almost wholly from within. They are vigorous, unique, but fanciful; in order to enlarge, extend them, give them practicability, there must be joined to them ideas from without.

ORESSA—(*With animation.*) Oh, I'll get plenty of that from people! I'll be a sponge absorbing everything. Never fear! Then I shall discover for myself what this experience is worth and if the joys of the senses can be adequately measured with those of the contemplative mind.

DUQUET—A young girl shouldn't be overly concerned about contemplation.

ORESSA—Oh, I was born to be concerned about contemplation! There wasn't anything else for me to do.

DUQUET—Now, after you have made acquaintance with many of these sensual pleasures, the more frivolous the better, in your case, have tried out some of the joys and sorrows of life, perhaps even experienced the grand passion, I want you to try your hand again at a play. And when it is written, bring it to me.

ORESSA—(*Her face changing.*) You don't think the play I sent is good enough to be produced?

DUQUET—There is missing from it the unity essen-

tial to the success of an acting play. I can work it over if you wish.

ORESSA—That wouldn't be fair, for it would no longer be my play.

DUQUET—You are superhonest; but you are right. You must work out your own destiny independently. The time is not yet mature for your début on the stage of affairs. Here is your manuscript. (*Extends to her the parcel.*) You will find I have made a good many notes on the margin and offered some suggestions from a technical point of view. I warn you I am merciless with my blue pencil.

ORESSA—(*In a tremulous voice, receiving the manuscript.*) I thank you very much. I am deeply grateful for the interest you have taken in me.

DUQUET—Don't mention it. I assure you I am only too glad to be of the least service to you.

ORESSA—I appreciate the pains you have taken to do that service for a stranger. (*Covers her face and bursts into tears.*)

VIRGINIA—(*Running forward and flinging her arms around Oressa.*) Never mind, Essie! Never mind, kid!

DUQUET—(*With embarrassment.*) Oh, I entreat you, don't cry.

ORESSA—(*In a broken voice.*) I am disappointed. I *can't* help it! (*Weeps bitterly.*)

DUQUET—Oh, come, come! I beg of you, don't cry!

ORESSA—To long reflect upon a thing, to bestow upon it loving care and toil,—with fondest pride and eager anticipation to watch it unfolding day by day under your hand to ever fairer proportions, as a mother

watches her babe,—to see it reach its consummation, and then to find it worthless; oh, it is hard!

DUQUET—(*Earnestly.*) But it isn't worthless. It is full of splendid promise! In it is the germ of a noble idea!

ORESSA—You say that to soften the severity of your judgment! (*With a despairing gesture.*) I hate it! (*Flings the parcel to the floor.*) You are only a little older than I—why should you succeed and I fail? It is the eternal injustice of nature that you should have wrought better than I because you are a man!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Warningly.*) Oressa!

ORESSA—(*Passionately.*) It is true, it is true! Whatever women attempt to perform, men so easily surpass them. Why should we try? What's the use? (*Duquet stoops, picks up the manuscript and lays it on the table.*)

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You ought to be ashamed to show yourself so ungrateful.

DUQUET—I am very, very sorry to have caused you this distress when my only thought was to help, not to discourage you.

ORESSA—I am ashamed, and I ask your pardon for being so rude. (*Smiles through her tears and holds out her hand.*) Now are you going to forgive me? What must you think of me?

DUQUET—Ah, but I understand. (*Takes her hand.*) If at any time in the coming future you should be in trouble or meet with misfortune, I want you to call upon me. Will you promise to do so?

ORESSA—Why are you so kind to one who has

not the slightest claim upon your consideration?

DUQUET—(*Looking deep in her eyes.*) Not the slightest, rather a claim the most imperative, for in you the eternal spirit of Art makes its appeal to me. When you are in need of me, come or send for me. Do not forget. Until then, adieu.

Exit, followed by Virginia.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*To Oressa.*) Why do you show yourself out so? First go and write to the man and ask him as a favor to look over and judge your work, and then because his opinion doesn't please you, abuse him. How are you going to get on in the world if you don't cultivate a little policy?

ORESSA—(*Disdainfully.*) Policy is the weapon of mediocre souls without sovereign abilities to recommend them, who truckle their way by soft insinuations and subtleties to the ends they desire; a soul conscious of its merits moves direct on its independent course and speaks without fear.

HOLLIDAY—You should try and curb your impetuosity. Self-control, even for a conceited miss like yourself, is the first thing to learn. That is a most free-handed young man and you should have tried to make a friend of him when he apparently was kindly disposed toward you.

(*Oressa paces the floor in deep thought.*)

Reënter Virginia.

SCENE III

ORESSA—(*Eagerly.*) He has gone?

VIRGINIA—Yes. A breath from the great outside world wafted in our humdrum retreat! I have read

of such polished men but I never met one before! It is like the hero stepping out of a story book into really and truly life. I am carried away with him. He's just a charming young man!

HOLLIDAY—(*Aside to Mrs. Holliday.*) A generous young man who elects a choice brand of Havanas.

ORESSA—Charming? Rather a fateful man, a mysterious irresistible force that I am conscious is going to control the events of my coming life. Have I made a mistake by my voluntary act in giving him opportunity to shape my destiny? Will his entrance, whose way was opened by me, prove my fortune or misery?

VIRGINIA—Why, how strangely you talk!

ORESSA—(*Her hand to her brow.*) Not more strangely than I feel. I feel that his advent to-night is the precursor of a new epoch for me and that he is inextricably mixed with all that is subsequently to happen. (*With a bewildered expression she gazes before her.*) I see in the distance shadows where are dimly outlined shifting kaleidoscopic scenes amidst which vague forms float. Now there is a light and I can distinguish him and other young men moving as in a panorama. The light increases, becomes brilliant, and the scene resolves itself into a stage. In front of the stage is a pit densely filled from orchestra to dress circle with upturned faces,—faces, a sea of faces everywhere, from balcony to gallery. . . . It fades and there dawns a new scene in which I discern *him,* another man, a stranger, and, yes, Merritt—and there is a woman, too, a beautifully-gowned woman. Why, it is myself! Oh! (*Emits a cry and covers her eyes,*

shuddering convulsively.)

VIRGINIA—(*Tenderly.*) Your imagination is running away with you, dear. You are overwrought from your disappointment.

ORESSA—(*Still shuddering.*) I think I am overwrought. (*Changes suddenly to cheerful mood.*) And yet I am not so disappointed after all, for I am conscious of a power indwelling here so buoyant and elastic as to triumphantly defy defeat and surmount any and all difficulties in my path. (*With elation.*) I believe everything is going to prove bright for me and that I shall reach out and take all the blessings this world holds for mortals. My star says so. My whole life will be different, and it will actually seem like being born again to be so happy and with such a multitude of things to think about. A lovely home, a doting husband who has promised to give me whatever I ask for—he gets such a *big* salary—and I shall ask for pretty dresses the first thing! (*Childishly.*) Just picture to yourself little me trailing over Royal Wiltons in silken gowns that swish and rustle as I go! (*Goes dancing about the room. Stops, flings her arms around Virginia.*) Remember, old girl, you are going to share my good fortune and prosperity with me. You are going to be dolled up and taken about to see and enjoy some life. And we shall get you a husband!

VIRGINIA—(*Shaking her head and laughing.*) Oh, a husband! I'm past that!

ORESSA—(*With a kiss and hug.*) A woman is never past having a husband! Most people think that's what she's created for. And you will make such a model wife, dutifully sewing on his buttons and mend-

ing his socks and tucking in the kids every night. . . . Let's see what this high and mighty man has done to my unoffending old manuscript. (*Goes to the table. Eyes fall on a letter. Picks it up.*) Why, this letter is mine, from Almon. What is it doing here?

Scene III

Mrs. Holliday—I put it there when I took it from the mail carrier this afternoon, and then it slipped my mind.

Oressa—(*Tearing open the envelope.*) I haven't heard from him in over a week. Short and sweet! That means he is soon coming to see us. (*Face changes as she reads.*) It cannot be! (*Looks about in a dazed way. Staggers to a chair and falls into it.*)

Mrs. Holliday—(*In alarm.*) Is he sick or dead? What's the matter?

Oressa—(*In a dazed voice.*) Matter? He's a scoundrel and I've been tricked!

(*Virginia catches up the letter and reads.*)

For some time past the conviction has been coming over me that we are not fitted to each other. Both our temperaments and tastes are so different that a union for life I fear would be a very serious mistake. A woman whose heart is set on literary attainment is no more likely to make an average man happy than the man of genius is likely to prove a good mate for the ordinary woman. I have arrived at the conclusion that I could not reach up to your standard, as also that

the strain of trying to keep pace would become too fatiguing.

Some weeks back, on a business trip, I met a young lady who, though not ambitious and gifted, as you are, yet seems to possess the homely qualities that would make an every-day man a good wife. The attraction she exerted over me has increased so steadily that, finding I could no longer be happy apart from her, I married her yesterday.

I make no excuses for my conduct toward you beyond the explanations I have offered above. Whilst I realize that I have done you a grave wrong, still I feel that you are not left without compensations, indeed that you are destined to mate with a more exceptional man than am I, and so in the end you will concur with me that this is not the worst thing that could happen. Anyway, the thing has happened, and I can't see how it can be changed now.

I remain very sincerely,

ALMON.

MRS. HOLIDAY—(*Bursting forth.*) I always distrusted that man! There were about him silent, stealthy ways unlike those of other young men who are open and straightforward.

ORESSA—(*Moaning.*) It cannot be, it cannot be! It is incredible he would sacrifice me to some other girl!

HOLLIDAY—(*Warmly.*) He is a mean, contemptible sneak to treat you such a trick, and you are well rid of him!

ORESSA—I had every confidence in him, pa.

I thought him upright and square. I cannot conceive of his putting so base an imposition upon me.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I cannot conceive of his *daring* to put such an affront on our family!

HOLLIDAY—It is an insult to your brothers and should be resented by them!

ORESSA—(*Moaning.*) I believed he thought so much of me. He acted so fond. Only the last time he was here he held me in his arms . . . he kissed me again and again, he lingered over me as though he could not bring himself to part with me. Oh, it does not seem possible he could deceive me so!

HOLLIDAY—(*Excitedly.*) I'd rather see you laid in your coffin than married to such a man! I can't think of a worse fate for a girl than to be tied for life to a base, unprincipled hound! You can count yourself as lucky that he has revealed himself in his true colors and that you have found him out in time!

ORESSA—(*Rocking to and fro.*) In time? Oh, that I had found him out before I ever learned to love him! Oh, that I had never known him!

VIRGINIA—(*Soothingly.*) It will come right, dear. You are young and your opportunities are still open before you. You will meet the right one some time and then you will see this is for the best.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You have had the narrowest kind of escape! Mrs. Earle didn't tell me of the treatment he gave her poor Louise unless there was something in it!

HOLLIDAY—(*Turning on his wife.*) If you were warned, Oressa should have had sense enough to let him alone!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—That's just like you, Mr. Holliday, to shift the blame on me! And you are just as deserving of blame as I, for you were not left unawares of what Mrs. Earle informed me and you were willing the marriage should go on!

VIRGINIA—Oh, hush! Oressa didn't believe it, he made himself so amiable and soft-spoken as he laid siege to her heart! The poor child wanted love and she had no chances for choosing admirers as other girls have.

HOLLIDAY—Then she should have gone out and mixed with others instead of cooping herself up here dreaming her life away, her head in the clouds!

VIRGINIA—She was reduced to depending upon her own resources for entertainment.

HOLLIDAY—Nonsense! You are all the time trying to make the girl dissatisfied with her lot, and trying to make her think she's a martyr, to say nothing of your attempt to poison her young mind against her father. I should think you'd be ashamed.

VIRGINIA—Don't be unreasonable, pa. How in the name of common sense could a girl with the pride Oressa has go around with young people of her own class when she hadn't decent clothes to wear, or a house in any condition in which to receive company? She kept her self-respect and stayed at home as did her sister before her.

HOLLIDAY—(*Testily.*) There you go again. Load it all on me. It's just what I expected! Whatever goes awry with any of you, sooner or later it is laid at my door. I don't believe another man in the United States is cursed with worse henpecking women.

VIRGINIA—You haven't done right by us. You deprived us of the education that would have prepared us to earn our livelihood elsewhere and gained us independence.

HOLLIDAY—You had education more than enough to unsettle you just as have all the dissatisfied women of these days who have abandoned their natural duties and are running loose craving the excitement of publicity, agitating in meetings their rights, and trying to take over men's work in the world. It isn't the part of girls to earn livelihoods. It is their business to stay home, to marry and settle down and rear children.

VIRGINIA—(*Spiritedly.*) Then you should have seen to it that we had a fair deal at home, that we had clothes fit to make an appearance in and a little money to spend on entertaining and going about.

HOLLIDAY—I hadn't the money to waste on fripperies.

VIRGINIA—I say you haven't been fair.

HOLLIDAY—These are fine becoming reproaches from one's child! That daughters should turn on their father is the direct outcome of an age of uneasy idle women, disgruntled with their lot in life, not knowing what they want or what is good for them, and eternally prating about their injustices.

VIRGINIA—Women are not responsible for their state of unrest and discontent. Rather say the upward trend of civilization that has caught and carried humanity, men and women alike, onward in its swirl, is responsible.

HOLLIDAY—Puh! All that ails women in these days

is that men have spoiled them and not left them enough to do, and neither will they do anything that doesn't bring them to outside notice.

ORESSA—(*Staggering to her feet.*) I must go away now for a change.

HOLLIDAY—Go away—where?

ORESSA—(*Her hand to her brow.*) I don't know.

HOLLIDAY—You better know that when you are well off you will stay in the home that has sheltered you so long.

ORESSA—I am tired of the everlasting monotony of this shelter. All at once it is suffocating me; I can endure it no longer.

HOLLIDAY—What do you think you want?

ORESSA—My right to live, my chance to do my part and to take my knocks in the open, to know the exhilarating joy of battling for my place, the exultant satisfaction of wresting my success. I am twenty-five years old, and I feel I have been on this planet a hundred, and yet I have to learn what this world is like and what it contains for me, and I am curious to find out if I am able to conquer it.

HOLLIDAY—Deluded, headstrong girl! What do you expect you are going to do, who have never been half a day's journey from here?

ORESSA—Make my way.

HOLLIDAY—But you do not know how to make it. You are not prepared to do anything.

ORESSA—(*Proudly.*) I have my resources.

HOLLIDAY—Which will prove not worth two cents to you. You'll make a perfect failure if you undertake this writing business expecting to live by it. Why,

many a man well trained and experienced has gone down under it, yes, and starved, too, if he didn't have other means of gaining a livelihood to fall back on!

ORESSA—How does any one know that until I have had opportunity to make the trial?

HOLLIDAY—(*Contemptuously.*) Because it isn't in you.

ORESSA—How do you know that?

HOLLIDAY—Know it! Am I not your father and can a stream get above its source? (*Mockingly.*) You are infatuated with your abilities. I tell you what, you will be only too glad after a few weeks of your knocks in the open to come crawling back to the despised shelter of your father's house.

ORESSA—I won't crawl back. I am not of the sort who goes on her knees, you know that, pa.

HOLLIDAY—(*Bitterly.*) You will be glad to go on your knees in order to get yourself taken care of after you have been buffeted hither and thither, starved and insulted!

ORESSA—I am not afraid of being downed. I defy the world to down any one whose spirit is strong enough to resist it. If I make good, I will come back; otherwise, I stay away. Is that an independent proposition?

HOLLIDAY—Humph!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Don't make foolish threats, child.

ORESSA—But I am not making threats, mommy. I am just offering a proposition to pa. (*Begins to laugh immoderately.*) Isn't it funny a free woman should be under the necessity of making any explanation concerning her liberty of action, or entering into a pact before she dares take a decisive step! (*Continues*

laughing. To Virginia, who has started to follow her.) Don't follow me, dear. I know you feel all kindness to me, but I cannot bear to have any one talk to me now. I shall feel differently after I have been alone a little while.

Exit Oressa.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Starting to her feet.*) The girl is crazed with grief. It is no time for you to quarrel with her. You ought to know better than to bandy words with her at such a crisis.

HOLLIDAY—Let her alone to come to herself. She has shown herself out to her father as an insolent, thankless girl.

VIRGINIA—The rankling injustice of years has in the moment of her stress found utterance.

HOLLIDAY—What are you talking about?

VIRGINIA—If your own conscience fails to tell you, then I will explain what I mean. She resents the insignificance to which you consigned her because she was a girl, the grudging benefits you accorded her reduced to the barest necessities, whilst she could not avoid seeing that what was done for her reluctantly from motives of duty the most strict, was done in the case of her brothers willingly, eagerly, even anticipating their wants.

HOLLIDAY—(*With stern rebuke.*) Oh, it is wrong for sisters to nourish such a feeling of jealousy against their brothers!

VIRGINIA—It goes deeper than jealousy; it is a feeling that we have been cheated out of the claims of our girlhood, more, our just rights as human beings!

HOLLIDAY—I have done everything that lay in my

power for my children and it is meet they turn on me, now I am no longer fit to work, with reproaches because I was unable to do more! I and your mother have denied ourselves the comforts, the recreations of our youth and middle age, cheerfully sacrificed our own desires, our natural inclinations to ease and pleasure, whilst we struggled and toiled unremittingly, upborne by our ambition for our children's future.

VIRGINIA—And we girls, too, suffered all our lives in that self-denial you practised.

HOLLIDAY—It was necessary we economized, conserved our little resources. I was poor, I was without friends or powerful influence. From the first I was firmly resolved that my boys should not be handicapped in the race as their father had been, because of the lack of suitable training become the butts of insolent tyranny, the slaves of exacting and domineering masters!

They should have the most favorable opportunity, the very best equipment it was in my power to give them. That was our purpose toward which we resolutely turned our faces.

VIRGINIA—You overdid it as do the other self-made fathers of this age beset with the fetich of the higher education, regardless of the fitness of those who are to receive it! Because you had fought your way upward without a helping hand extended in aid, you went to the opposite extreme with them. You indulged them, you smoothed from their pathways the obstacles. You continued to boost them, making it all too easy and taking from them the desire to exert their own energies, as also depriving them of learning through struggle and difficulty the value of their education. And they

are selfish, money-spending, bent on their own comfort and pleasure, careless of the convenience or good times of others less favored, whom they ruthlessly push aside!

HOLLIDAY—(*Tauntingly.*) Meaning yourself, I suppose.

VIRGINIA—They are as indifferent to what becomes of Oressa and me as though we were the veriest outsiders. I tell you, there is something wrong in a rearing that teaches the men of a family to have not the slightest consideration for the women!

HOLLIDAY—Now I am accused, because I strained my every energy toward enabling my boys to become useful citizens, and to make some creditable figures in the world, with cruelly repressing my daughters! You insinuate I have failed in love for you!

VIRGINIA—It is not that I accuse you of failing to love us, but that you love your sons infinitely more.

HOLLIDAY—It is no criterion I love them infinitely more because I have considered them first in the matter of advantages when they represent the name.

VIRGINIA—(*Resentfully.*) The cut and dried philosophy of old-fashioned days that teaches because women are women, they should always stand second, for the reason they are of no particular account in the scheme of life.

HOLLIDAY—They are not as measured against men's greater natural potency!

VIRGINIA—Imbued with that traditional idea, thus have you neglected, failed to develop our possibilities, given us no means by which we might be enabled to prove ourselves! Without confidence in our potentialities, you therefore have condemned us without trial.

(*Bitterly.*) Your pride is in your sons, not in your daughters.

HOLLIDAY—(*Passionately.*) My pride is in those who are grateful to me for my efforts in their behalf, not in those who heap undeserved reproach and abuse upon my head!

VIRGINIA—But you are blind, pa. You only see from the one viewpoint! It is utterly hopeless to appeal to you, for you cannot put yourself in our place!

HOLLIDAY—(*Leaping to his feet and advancing with threatening gestures upon Virginia.*) Silence, I tell you! If you say another word, you ungrateful woman, I'll turn you out of the doors! We can manage without you or your sister, and it would be a relief to me if you would both get out!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Benn, I beg of you not to talk so unguardedly!

HOLLIDAY—(*Unheeding and with flashing eyes, to Virginia.*) It is you who can only see from the one side of the shield! How about our side? How about your mother and me, who were here long before you were even so much as thought of, who earned this home and who continue still to provide for it? Ours is the right to live our own lives as we will, and to spend our own earnings as seems best to us. I tell you, we don't need any advice as to our way of doing things and if you don't like it, you are not obliged to stay! It is the eternal tragedy of parents to be judged and censured and governed by those whom they brought into the world and reared! I have heard enough of this prattle of injustice! This is a free land, and if you think you are not being used right, you are at

liberty to go where you can do better for yourself! (*Tauntingly.*) All that ails you, Miss, is that you are jealous because your brothers are so much brighter than you.

VIRGINIA—(*In a ringing voice.*) Though everything has been done to make them so, I deny that they are!

HOLLIDAY—What have you ever done save live off me?

VIRGINIA—My God, can partiality make a man so blind to common reason?

HOLLIDAY—Go, I say! (*Raises his hand menacingly. Virginia looks at him in fearless disdain. Slowly, without moving an eyelash, she moves backward.*)

Exit.

(*Holliday paces the floor restlessly, evincing much perturbation. Gloomily.*) Was ever a man so found fault with, so badgered, whose intentions have not been other than kindly and for the best interests of his family? That is the most exasperating girl I believe ever lived. She drives me frantic, Beulah!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—They are all of them a continual care and anxiety. I sometimes think those are fortunate who never had any children, for they are spared the pains and worries of responsibility. As I look back, Benn, on the years that have passed, I can see that our happiest days, though full of toil and privation, were those when our children were little and dependent on our love.

HOLLIDAY—(*Groaning.*) Before they had grown big enough to upbraid us.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I am uneasy about that poor child.

She has had a terrible blow. I hope Virginia can afford her a little consolation.

HOLLIDAY—(*Continuing to pace the floor.*) I am all worked up and unstrung.

Reënter Virginia with a folded slip of paper.

SCENE IV

VIRGINIA—(*To Holliday.*) You have had your wish, pa, as regards one of us.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—How is Oressa?

VIRGINIA—She is gone!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Gone?

VIRGINIA—I went to her room to see if I could comfort her a little. The gas was turned low. Nothing was apparently disarranged or disturbed. No one was there. I called. I received no answer. Then I saw this folded note lying on Trelawny's "Recollections" on her dresser. (*Opens the note and reads.*)

I am going away. Don't worry. It is all right. Some time you will understand. . . . I took ten dollars from your purse, mommy, which I will repay as soon as I sell Merritt's ring. Tell pa I have made up my mind to make good.

Lovingly,

ORESSA.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Gone! I thought her talk about going for herself was just a mere threat.

VIRGINIA—(*With a bitter smile.*) She does not

spend her time making idle threats as some others of us do; she acts.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Why, the girl has never been away from home a day in her life! She has not had the slightest experience in traveling! She will come to harm! (*Excitedly.*) We must go right after her and bring her back!

HOLLIDAY—(*Grimly.*) Let her go. She needs the lesson. Let her find out what the hardships of this world are and what real poverty means. Maybe, then, she'll come back and appreciate what her father has done for her. (*Sits down heavily on the sofa.*)

(*Several moments pass, charged with deepest suspense.*)

HOLLIDAY—(*In a broken voice.*) For my devotion to my family, for the best years of my strength spent in its service,—this is my reward! Those who should be the solace of my old age are its affliction!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—We thought we had trouble years ago when death took little Arthur from us, but this is the worst we have ever known! (*Begins to cry.*)

VIRGINIA—(*To Holliday.*) Don't censure her too harshly. Remember she is ardent, full of restless energy, even as you were in the days of your young strength, and now that her expectation of marriage is gone, she craves action. If she stayed on here after this misfortune that has come to her to-night, what would she have with which to occupy herself save her brooding disappointment? What would she have to look forward to save years of forlorn emptiness dragging their weary length and slowly consuming courage and hope! It is better she goes.

HOLLIDAY—(*In a stricken voice.*) Because she feels she has nothing to expect from her father. To have my child leave me because she thinks I have been unfair to her, to be forsaken by my youngest, my baby girl,—oh, it is bitter! I did the best I knew how, as God is my witness! (*Bends his white head in his hands.*)

VIRGINIA—(*Going to him and putting her hand on his shoulder.*) You did the best as you saw the light. I am sorry, pa, for what I said a while back. I spoke in my blind anguish and passion. I fully recognize your right to do with your own as you see fit and I know it is not for me to turn you aside from your chosen way of life. I am sorry what I said, pa. I didn't mean to be unfilial.

(*Holliday remains silent, his head bent in his hands.*)

Curtain falls slowly.

ACT II

A study in Duquet's New York Apartments.

It is a spacious room with a rich dark Wilton rug on the floor and contains a leather couch, easy chairs, bookcase, a writing desk of mahogany, and pictures on the walls. A fire of gas logs is burning in the grate on the west side, surmounted by a high mantel. In the middle of the room is a dining-table, covered with a white damask cloth, from which everything has been removed save the wine bottles, glasses and cigar trays. There are two doors beside the double doors of the main entrance that open on a corridor that gives upon outside stairs, one being at the north-east extremity, the other to the north-west covered with a red velvet portière and leading to Duquet's private suite.

A large window is to the south-east.

TIME—*Nearly midnight of evening in late November, three years later.*

Duquet, Leavenworth, MacLachlan, Davies, and other members of the Parnassus Circle, are seated around the table smoking.

SCENE I

LEAVENWORTH—(*In soft, deliberate accents, and tilting luxuriously back in his chair.*) Well, I can

say with a clear conscience that whatever our host's deficiencies may be in the matter of the fine arts in general, in that of choosing wines and cigars he is a born connoisseur.

DUQUET—Say whatever comes in your head, old top. These are the secure heights so far removed from the miasma of common earth that free speaking is safely indulged in without the slightest risk of any one's *amour propre* being wounded.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Softly and slowly.*) But 'twould be folly to criticize Havanas of such unimpeachable variety.

MACLACHLAN—What the dickens are we poor devils to do when our turn rolls around for playing the host? I can't afford to provide genuine weeds like these.

LEAVENWORTH—Aw, you could afford to provide 'em well enough if you didn't hurl your plunks at the play girls. It's lamentable for a man to whom we look as a guide in matters of conduct to continue in the indulgence of such unseemly levity as you do at your time of life.

MACLACHLAN—Hold up on your homily, you canting Pharisee, you arch hypocrite! How dare you make references to my having gone off in the sere and yellow! Why, you're five years older than I if you're a day!

LEAVENWORTH—I shall expose your disreputable behavior before this august company nor leave you a shred of garment to decently cover your unsanctified hide. Hear then, gentlemen: From my box only the other night I saw this unregenerate hoary rascal

sitting in bald-headed row in the brazen occupation of ogling my actresses!

DAVIES—The vision of their coyly revealed charms doubtless excited his too ready susceptibilities even more than the white bosoms of Garrick's girls disturbed the serenity of that irreproachable old moralist, Sam Johnson.

MACLACHLAN—The stuff you had crammed in their innocent mouths was so confoundedly high-brow that in sheer desperation I had to divert myself a trifle for the punishment of sitting through the dreary mess.

LEAVENWORTH—After luring them for three consecutive hours with false smiles, after lulling their apprehensions to sleep with vigorous applause, you had the consummate meanness the next morning to roast the entire cast.

MACLACHLAN—'Twas my duty. I have tried to conscientiously fill Bill Winters's shoes. And plain honesty forces me to say that it was Sudermann, Hauptmann, Max Halbe, all mixed together in an indistinguishable concoction! Ye powers!

DUQUET—Go it, old top!

(*Leavenworth makes a playful lunge at MacLachlan. Good humor and laughter prevail among the Parnassians.*)

DAVIES—Oh, that mine enemy would write a play!

LEAVENWORTH—(*Significantly.*) He can write a novel all right and there are plenty of reviewers lurking around every corner.

A PARNASSIAN—If you want to hear the welcome music of the good American dollars jingling merrily

in your jeans, let your writings be shallow and obvious, guiltless of design, treating of nothing in particular, of a structure the slightest and import the most flimsy. Disregard such trifling details as sequence or coherence; eschew whatever is subtle or puzzling or liable to kindle thought, shun the vital questions that confront human life as you would the plague, away with its serious issues! If you want to creep snugly to the heart of the dear undiscriminating public, don't make any attempt toward an aim, just jot down whatever unreflecting idea chances to pop in your head.

ANOTHER PARNASSIAN—Give the public balderdash.

A PARNASSIAN—Use the same old themes, the same old plots, the same old solutions and point the same old moral. Above all, be sure and make it end happily. Keep to the stock pattern and be safe. That's the recipe for an artistic success in this country.

DUQUET—But you can't have any real artistic success without ideas back of it.

A PARNASSIAN—Pshaw! What's artistic success save tickling the public? And does the public want ideas? It wants amusement!

DUQUET—If the ideas are big enough to really impress it, it welcomes them. When a play is lacking in ideas, what does it stand for? If it is worth anything as a contribution to the world it represents the man who wrote it, indeed is a vital part of him, expressing as it does his reflections and views of life if not his special experience. And if he is sincere he writes from that individual standpoint as he sees life through his own nature, personal observation, and, as

he knows it, through practical acquaintance.

ANOTHER PARNASSIAN—You and your running-mate, Leavenworth, take your mission too seriously. You are too conscientious in your aims. Come to earth and the gold will rush in a flood to overflow your coffers.

DUQUET—(*Laughing.*) I begin to believe there are Philistines of the deepest dye here who have managed some way to scale the heights and interlope themselves amidst this transcendent company.

MACLACHLAN—That reminds me there's a new candidate for membership in our circle.

DUQUET—Who is the would-be member?

MACLACHLAN—Young Sprigg, of the Columbia faculty.

LEAVENWORTH—What's he done that he should aspire to the honor of being reckoned a Parnassian?

MACLACHLAN—He has published a very creditable volume of essays that reveal painstaking scholarship.

DAVIES—We are not going to receive him.

LEAVENWORTH—Not a chap is eligible here who hasn't achieved a piece of work of original and significant value that stamps him as of the distinctly creative order of mind.

MACLACHLAN—He's a nice gentlemanly chap.

LEAVENWORTH—So there are hundreds of nice chaps but we are not of the mind to avail ourselves of their gentlemanly society.

MACLACHLAN—He's making a desperate bid for fame in the intellectual world.

LEAVENWORTH—He needn't bid for entrance here.

MACLACHLAN—What the deuce am I to tell him?

He's my personal friend.

LEAVENWORTH—Tell him this is a close and discriminating and snobbish corporation and you'll have to turn down his application.

A PARNASSIAN—Yes, turn it down.

PARNASSIANS—(*Together.*) Turn it down!

LEAVENWORTH—(*Laughing.*) A cheer for our solidarity.

PARNASSIANS—(*Together.*) Hurrah!

DUQUET—I make a bid that our responsibilities be steadfastly directed toward the raising of literature to its highest plane whatever may be the obstacles confronting us either in failure to win ephemeral popularity or in detriment to personal advantage.

A PARNASSIAN—Hear, hear!

DAVIES—Mine host stands confessed an idealist of the most uncompromising stripe.

DUQUET—Every man present is an idealist or he wouldn't have been able to effect the achievement that gained him his admittance here.

MACLACHLAN—In addition, he's a second Shelley, a champion of the regeneration of Society. You are young, my son, you are young!

PARNASSIANS—Hear, hear!

MACLACHLAN—Oh, you kid, you picturesque Southern kid! What impracticable fancies do you not cherish in that dreamy brain!

DAVIES—We chaps who plume ourselves on the idea that we are specially deputed by the Muses to deliver new and important truths to a waiting world are as circumscribed in our knowledge and outlook on life as the veriest tyros. What, for instance, do

we really know of the great submerged tenth?

MacLachlan—We might, like Charles Dickens, take midnight rambles in dark out-of-the-way places, discovering hidden retreats in order to acquaint ourselves with the habits and manner of existence of the desperate characters who infest the slums.

A Parnassian—Place ourselves on a pleasant, easy comraderish footing with thieves, hired assassins, cut-throats, and such delectable gentry. 'Twould surely prove a diverting experience.

(*Leavenworth goes and stretches himself out full length on the sofa where he smokes meditatively.*)

Davies—You do not fully take in my meaning. The submerged is not confined alone to the foul, depraved, hopelessly vicious and degenerate, it includes also the unfortunate, the miserably poor, the disenfranchised of earth, cheated out of their opportunities by reason of social injustice and arbitrary distinctions, though both alike are the victims of an unfair system.

MacLachlan—Aw, you are trying to foist socialism on us!

Davies—(*Rising and pacing the floor.*) Here are we chaps, born and reared to the great middle class, snugly sandwiched between the strata representing the extremes of misery and prosperity,—the substantial conservative class that pledges us from the outset to a degree at any rate of decency and external respectability. And the divisions of this middle class formed by professional association, like standards of living, and like social ideals are as rigidly defined, as difficult to escape as the Brahmanical castes. Who goes outside his clique now-a-days? Who has interest in or

indeed knows aught of life that is not bounded by his social traditions or needs? The great throbbing life of the world of humanity is a blank.

Thus trained to fixed standards of education, imbued with certain well-defined, well-established aims, excellent enough, we admit, if we are true to our instructions and traditions, I might with propriety add our instincts, our writings are in accordance. What is the result? Why, the portrayal of matter-of-fact conditions so utterly conventional as to debar much vigor or originality. A man is not moved to either great invention or magnificent eloquence unless he is treating of a theme that stirs his own soul to its depths as some major wrong to be righted, the mishap of pitiful circumstance that involves the suffering of the innocent, the yielding to temptation with the consequent expiation of the offense. If we know nothing of these, of the trials of those handicapped by ignorance, beset by evils, of the misery endured by those exposed to want, often reduced to the very elementals of life, how are we to overmaster, to possess ourselves of the hearts of our audience? Is it to be wondered at that we lack power, go stale? And then we think we are commissioned to portray women folks! What man here, I should like to know, has any real understanding of a woman? Don't answer all of you at once.

First Parnassian—She's a riddle, a Bœotian Thebes, and the wise man is he who has sense enough to know he can't solve the mystery of her!

Parnassians—(*Together.*) Hear, hear!

Leavenworth—The mystery of her lies within ourselves.

PARNASSIANS—(*Together.*) Hear, hear!

LEAVENWORTH—I repeat, there is no enigma about her save of our own making.

MACLACHLAN—Are you in delirium, Levvy, that you mock us thus?

LEAVENWORTH—Never more consciously sane. We have conceived out of our brains a creature belonging neither to heaven nor earth, a creature whom we have endowed with every social and domestic quality, whom we have imbued with the surpassing virtue, grace and excellence of a goddess, lacking only reason and intelligence. And having conceived her in this state of moral perfection, we have been busy since in trying to make the reality correspond with our ideal, which has been the prevailing ideal of centuries of other men. When we are willing to take this creature off its impossible pedestal and admit in our minds that it is just a being like ourselves, sprung from a race of others like ourselves, moved by the identical desires, the identical hopes that impel us, possessed of the same prejudices, frailties and weaknesses, inspired by the same passions and emotions that are common to us, then shall we comprehend her and know her to be neither better nor worse than the other half of human kind, the half we represent!

MACLACHLAN—Why, Levvy, do you realize you are reducing her to the earthy of the earthy if she partakes of our moral infirmities? Unchivalrous man!

DUQUET—It is repugnant to degrade woman to such a level. I prefer to think of her as a being of unblemished morality, of noble unassailable virtue.

LEAVENWORTH—The stock talk of a Southerner,

my son, who whilst he pelts her with the roses of his fine homage will deliberately repress the strivings of her mind and deny her the most precious aspirations of her womanhood!

The chap who has done a misdemeanor now and then, sowed a few wild oats here and there in his youthful days, even committed a grave sin, is accounted a stronger man and better qualified to withstand future temptations, and to pronounce through experience of good and evil the advantage of decent conduct over bad, than he who has never proved life or himself. Do we think less of this chap for his knowledge if it has served to broaden his character? Then why think less of a woman who has also known life?

DUQUET—Oh, I cannot admit the idea of woman whom we have always been taught to reverence building up her character through the experience of evil and worse, the defilement of her innocence!

LEAVENWORTH—I *can!* and more, I can bring myself to forgive her a lapse from that innocence even as I would ask to be forgiven because I know from my own case how hard it is to resist temptation when it presents itself in its subtly alluring shape!

DUQUET—The supreme test of character in man or woman lies in the moral force to withstand temptation.

LEAVENWORTH—The supreme test of character in man or woman lies in the ability Antæus like to rise grandly from defeat!

FIRST PARNASSIAN—Come, come, Levvy, do you know you are confessing yourself not only a radical but a downright revolutionist who would overthrow

the bulwarks of civilization and menace the peace of society? If you view with the same lenity license of conduct on woman's part as you view on ours, what is to become of the integrity of the family, the sanctity of the home, which constitute the fundamental unit in the organization of national life?

LEAVENWORTH—I am no conservatist where usages are worn out and where principles discriminate against one sex and are detrimental to its development.

ANOTHER PARNASSIAN—He is an uncompromising advocate of the one standard!

LEAVENWORTH—(*With deep earnestness.*) I am an uncompromising advocate of the Fair Deal! I thank heaven I am a citizen of the world, free from the narrow provincial opinions of a community,—the hard and fast notions of localism,—emancipated from adherence to any custom, cult, institution or country. If the rest of you who are mulish bigots holding tight to your moss-grown opinions because they are time-honored would just open your eyes, you would see things in a reasonable light.

(*Parnassians smile and exchange glances.*)

DUQUET—Such philosophy is too repugnant to entertain a moment.

LEAVENWORTH—And why is it repugnant, my son? Because we men in our relations with women are despotically selfish as Turks. We claim and keep them body and soul absolutely our own.

In order to preserve the family intact, which is the main concern of governments, monogamy has been made the symbol of civilization and it has become a game to be played to the end by the two paired off

together. Some men with a fine sense of honor and duty, when once pledged to it, play this game on the square; other men chafe unceasingly because their liberty of choice is restricted, their natural inclinations shackled, and try by devious means to circumvent and evade the rules and cheat their partners. Women, who are bound to the regulations more strictly than their mates and who are by nature the conservators of moral traditions, demand that every sister woman shall hold to the very letter of them. Woe to her who is discovered not playing fair, for the entire sex rises *en masse* to crush her by sheer weight of social interdiction! We demand from women that which we could not possibly give in return. The woman to whom we intrust this precious honor of ours dragged through the mire of a thousand contemptible follies, must come to us as unsullied from contact with the world, as free from trace of life's experience as a babe in arms. (*Rises and with his hands deep in his pockets strides about the room.*)

I sincerely believe that every form of life is unfolded by stages through uniform laws from lower to higher, and that this development in human life intellectually and morally is brought about through one agency only,—that of experience. And we have denied her that experience. The entire gist of the matter is, in these relations such a thing as equality of interests or responsibilities fails to exist and therefore they are devoid of justice. We have pampered, petted and fondled her as a child when she was in our favor, scolded and repressed her again as a child when she has offended, and cast her utterly aside at the first

major transgression. We have followed a course with her that has succeeded in crushing her individuality and dwarfing her soul. And it matters not what our exaggerated ideals of her innate superiority may be, the process has not failed in leaving its inevitable result.

DAVIES—We men allow ourselves a multitude of resources, grant ourselves a hundred good qualities and attributes of character, but we leave her only the one supreme possession,—her moral purity. She's perfect as an ideal to our minds, as a reality she's a being to be directed, bullied and kept subordinated to our masculine absolutism.

FIRST PARNASSIAN—Whatever she may be for the sake of argument as an ideal or a reality, our acts are a revelation of the incontrovertible truth that she's the most important thing existing on this footstool for every man of us. For her sake we strive, we toil up the steep road of knowledge, we seek to gain a footing on the slippery eminence of success. She's the mainspring of our activities, the inspirer of our ambitions, the blessed goal of our hopes and attainments. And among all the women of earth, the finest, the truest, the most brilliant, the most helpful are right here in little old U. S. A.! My toast is to the fairest flower of the world's civilization, the crown and glory of womanhood, the American girl, God bless her!

PARNASSIANS—(*Rising.*) To the American girl! (*They touch glasses and drink.*)

MACLACHLAN—(*Chanting.*) Sing the song that Dr. Martin Luther sang!

(*They join hands and sing.*)

Dir wünsch' ich Wein und Mädchenkuss,
Und deinem Klepper Pegasus
Die Krippe stets voll Futter!
Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weib und Gesang,
Der bleibt ein Narr sein Lebenlang,
Sagt Doktor Martin Luther.

(*They drink again.*)

FIRST PARNASSIAN—(*Setting down his glass.*) Dandy time, old top! Appreciate best of hospitality.

ANOTHER PARNASSIAN—Prince of hosts! Shan't forget this stimulating conversation. Good luck, Dukkie, auf wiedersehen!

(*They begin breaking up amidst jovial cries of Good night.*)

Exeunt Parnassians, leaving only Duquet, Leavenworth, MacLachlan and Davies.

DAVIES—When we meet a fortnight hence in my rooms the Parnassians will be privileged to hear the reading of my novel in manuscript.

LEAVENWORTH—You are the one who will be privileged to get our valuable opinion on its merits.

MACLACHLAN—Or to be damned by the thorough roasting the Circle will doubtless feel in duty bound to accord it.

DAVIES—I don't stand in any awe of your criticism, old boy. Some day you'll have a come-back red hot, never fear.

DUQUET—(*Listening.*) Is that rain?

LEAVENWORTH—Sounds mighty like it, kid.

(*Duquet goes to the window, raises it and looks out anxiously.*)

LEAVENWORTH—(*Chanting.*) Wait, oh, wait until mine enemy writes a book!

MACLACHLAN—Shut up your croaking! I've been pretty forbearing with you.

LEAVENWORTH—Forbearing, you reptile, and you've never missed a chance to sting me!

(*Duquet returns from the window and paces uneasily about the room.*)

MACLACHLAN—(*Laughing.*) I might have stung worse, with the provocation you've given me.

LEAVENWORTH—Professed friendship serves not the slightest protection when the devil of a dramatic critic is running loose. (*To Duquet.*) What the dickens is the matter with you, son? Expect your sweetheart, and in agony because we don't vamoose?

DUQUET—My sister.

LEAVENWORTH—Ah! beg pardon! Perhaps we'd better go, chaps.

DUQUET—No, no! I want you to meet her.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Languidly.*) Perhaps she won't consider herself very highly favored to meet three dyed-in-the-wool old batches.

DUQUET—She's just turned nineteen.

LEAVENWORTH—Then she's as safe with us as with her grandfathers.

MACLACHLAN—(*Bristling.*) I'll give you to understand, Mister, that I'm no dyed-in-the-wool old bachelor.

LEAVENWORTH—Pshaw! you're confirmed, Mac.

MACLACHLAN—There are yet hopes for love's young dream when a chap is still only sweet, unsophisticated, tender thirty-five. But when he's on the

wrong side of forty his outlook is certainly dubious.

LEAVENWORTH—I'm philosophic enough to be resigned to my fate; but you're sore, Mac, and struggling and kicking like a vicious horse at your waning chances. I believe your desperate state drives you to your surly attacks on unoffending dramatists. (*MacLachlan makes a lunge at him, which he nimbly evades.*)

DAVIES—There is a strong matrimonial chance for Dukkie, here. He's still in the running.

LEAVENWORTH—The youngest gentleman in company. Take warning in time, son, from the pitiful example of your elders and hie yourself to the altar as quickly as you can foot it.

DUQUET—Thanks for your kindly concern, but I am not going hunting after love. If it comes to me it will come naturally of itself. It's too beautiful and sacred a thing for a chap to go deliberately in search of. Why, to do that would spoil the whole charm of it!

LEAVENWORTH—When you reach the exalted age your venerable friends have attained to, you'll have to chase the pretty rainbow phantom at lively speed, or it sure will elude you as it has Mac, here.

(*MacLachlan makes another lunge at him.*)

Enter Flossie Duquet, nineteen years old, encased in a long rose-hued opera coat, wearing a big plumed evening hat and white gloves.

SCENE II

FLOSSIE—It's raining! Oh! (*Starts back.*)

DUQUET—(*Coming forward.*) Allow me to pre-

sent to you these gentlemen whom I very much desire you to meet because they are my staunchest friends. This is Leavenworth, Flossie, here are MacLachlan and Davies. Fellows, my sister.

FLOSSIE—(*In a sweet girlish high treble and with pronounced Southern accent.*) It is a great pleasure, gentlemen, to find you here. He has told me so much about you that I am fairly consumed with curiosity to learn if I have really formed a right opinion of you. (*Shaking hands severally.*) Mr. Leavenworth takes his profession seriously. He is the American von Hauptmann. Mr. MacLachlan, you are the arbiter of the stage, and a most conscientious one, too, I understand, sparing neither friend nor foe when in the discharge of your duty. And you, Mr. Davies, write novels which one cannot leave off reading when once started because the interest is so compelling. (*Begins to remove her opera cloak.*)

LEAVENWORTH—(*Springing forward.*) Allow me! (*Lays the cloak carefully over a chair. To MacLachlan.*) Well, Mac, are we to consider ourselves flattered by her estimate of our performances?

MACLACHLAN—Frankly, it opens grounds for some uncertainty.

FLOSSIE—(*Removing the pins from her hat.*) Oh, I mean to be complimentary, you know. I have not the slightest thought of wounding your *amour propre.* (*Laughs softly like a chime of silver bells and is disclosed in evening gown of blue charmeuse exposing neck and shoulders.*)

DUQUET—I've been worrying for fear you might get wet.

FLOSSIE—You needn't have worried. Mrs. Dalliance had her limousine and the chauffeur held an umbrella over me to the door. (*Gives her hat to Leavenworth, who deposits it with great care and deliberation on the top of the book case.*) You are altogether too concerned over me, Armand. (*To the others.*) This big brother of mine is a regular old fogy regarding me. He would keep me wrapped in cotton all the time if I didn't protest. (*Pats Duquet affectionately on the shoulder.*) Now, gentlemen, you are going to have coffee with me.

LEAVENWORTH—Indeed, no. We could not think of staying any longer. We have already imposed on your brother's hospitality. It is past twelve now and we have been here since eight o'clock.

FLOSSIE—(*Stripping off her long gloves.*) Then I reckon it will not do harm to any one if you stay a little longer. Positively, I shall not take no for an answer. (*Rings the bell.*)

MACLACHLAN—Oh, really!

DAVIES—It is so kind of you, but on account of the late hour we must go.

FLOSSIE—How can I become acquainted with you if you run away from me? So enough of your objections. I shall be right offended if you refuse me.

LEAVENWORTH—It is our last wish to offend you.

Enter Willetts.

FLOSSIE—Bring coffee for five, Willetts, and plates of sandwiches and cake.

WILLETTS—Yes, Miss.

Exit Willetts.

FLOSSIE—My brother wants me to know all his friends. (*Seats herself, displaying her pretty little feet in high-heeled white slippers. The men sit down, regarding her with admiration.*) Didn't you say so, Armand, when you invited me here?

DUQUET—Of course.

FLOSSIE—(*Confidentially.*) So that I could see which one I liked best.

DAVIES—If we do not prove a disappointment to you, we shall esteem ourselves signally honored.

FLOSSIE—How could literary men disappoint me?

LEAVENWORTH—Why might they not?

FLOSSIE—Why do you ask, Mr. Leavenworth, when you know they are so different from other men?

LEAVENWORTH—(*Smiling.*) How, different?

FLOSSIE—How? Er—— (*Triumphantly.*) Well, for one thing, they have more sentiment because they have time to devote to their feelings and indulge their nice sensibilities, while ordinary men are so busy doing real work in the world they can't spend thought on such things.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Smiling.*) You think literary men are not doing real work?

FLOSSIE—Why, not the practical, every-day work that is absolutely essential!

MACLACHLAN—She means they don't grow "the coarser plants of daily necessity."

FLOSSIE—You have said it, Mr. MacLachlan. How did you think up a way to express it so pat?

MACLACHLAN—I wasn't smart enough to think it up. I appropriated the phrase from an old duffer who used to live in the long ago at a place called Tarry-

town on the Hudson.

FLOSSIE—(*Naïvely.*) That shows they are so much cleverer and wittier than other men.

MACLACHLAN—But it is proverbial that literary men are dull in social life because they save their wit for their writings where it will bring them financial profit to the tune of so much per line.

FLOSSIE—(*Shaking her head.*) They couldn't help emitting flashes now and then when they are so chock-full of cleverness. You are jesting, Mr. MacLachlan. (*Triumphantly.*) I can prove it right here by my own brother. Armand is not dull and no one in my hearing shall disparage him!

MACLACHLAN—You have an enthusiastic championess!

DUQUET—I am glad I have one somewhere.

DAVIES—(*To Flossie.*) How do you like little old New York?

FLOSSIE—(*Enthusiastically.*) I perfectly adore it. With the stores, the big theaters, the darling restaurants, the beautiful women in their stunning gowns, it is right fascinating! I fairly dote on Broadway, and Fifth Avenue is the most wonderful boulevard, with a rush of automobiles going down one side and up the other all day long! I don't wonder people get run down and killed in New York. One never knows what is going to happen next. It is *so* exciting! I am enjoying every minute.

LEAVENWORTH—Of course you are.

FLOSSIE—Mrs. Dalliance, who is chaperoning me, takes me to no end of places,—to the opera one night, the theater, a ball or a reception the next, where I meet

such stacks of young men, many of them downright howling swells! Her husband is on the Exchange, you know, and disgustingly rich, and so she has entrée to all sorts of fashionable houses and she introduces me to lovely people who belong to what you call up here the smart set. We should call them at home the F. F. V's.

Reënter Willetts bearing a tray containing coffee, sandwiches and cake, which he sets on the table.

FLOSSIE—(*To Willetts.*) There, that will do. Thank you very much, Willetts.

Exit Willetts.

FLOSSIE—(*With charming grace beginning to pour the coffee from the silver pot into the china cups.*) To-night we went to the New Amsterdam to see your play, Mr. Leavenworth.

LEAVENWORTH—Ah, indeed. I hope you were not unfavorably impressed with it?

FLOSSIE—I thought it very nice indeed, only inclined to be a trifle gloomy and with such moving climaxes! . . . One or two lumps, Mr. Leavenworth?

LEAVENWORTH—Not any.

FLOSSIE—Oh, how odd! If you loved sweets as much as I do, Mr. Leavenworth, you would want two lumps at the very least.

LEAVENWORTH—I shall not forget your partiality for sweets.

FLOSSIE—I didn't dream of meaning that for a hint, you know, Mr. Leavenworth; it just slipped out unawares, but so long as you have taken it so, I will tell you I do prefer Allegretti, those big black chocolates. . . . How can you bring yourself to have your

heroine's emotions so tortured through such horrid trials if you really love her? And Armand says a playwright grows to love his heroine just as he would a sweetheart in real life. I was terribly worked on by your play. It was truly gripping.

MacLachlan—Did I understand you to say gripping or ripping?

Flossie—Gripping, of course, Mr. MacLachlan. Only farces and such cheap entertainments designed for common persons are ripping. I fear you are inclined to be sarcastic, Mr. MacLachlan. Will you have cream?

MacLachlan—Clear.

Flossie—You gentlemen are diverse in your tastes. Well, I felt all trembly and I couldn't hardly keep from crying all soft and to myself, you know, and all the audience was using its handkerchiefs and clearing its throats. Your people were in such trouble, Mr. Leavenworth. Why should people have trouble and suffer so when this world is full of happiness, with everything in it to enjoy? I never have trouble.

Leavenworth—Others are not so fortunate.

Flossie—Why, they could be if they were only sensible. They needn't allow themselves to be unfortunate. When I attended boarding-school, Mr. Leavenworth, I remember several rather shabby-looking girls there who were always going about complaining they were cut out from good times, that other girls snubbed them and that the teachers showed preference —favoritism, in short. It was such nonsense, Mr. Leavenworth. Why should any one want to slight any one else? It was just their imagination. Fancy

any one with such a jealous disposition! They should have immediately set about correcting it and curbing their unlovely tendencies, meanwhile not letting any of the good things get past them.

LEAVENWORTH—Suppose they couldn't get the good things?

FLOSSIE—Why, they are there to be gotten!

LEAVENWORTH—Supposing they proved too elusive for your shabby girls to grasp?

FLOSSIE—Now you are quizzing me, Mr. Leavenworth, and that isn't fair, you know.

MACLACHLAN—That man is always moralizing. He was a parson in his former state of existence, Miss Duquet, holding down his petrified congregation with his eternal twelfthlies and thirteenthlies.

FLOSSIE—(*Shaking her head.*) Perhaps he was a school master.

MACLACHLAN—(*With interest.*) Do you think any pedagogue could have been so eminently dull?

FLOSSIE—Oh, some are very dull and heavy. I know once I had a man teacher—he was the principal of the seminary—and when he put his eye-glasses astride his nose and stared at one he was downright portentous, you know. I stood in such trembling awe of him, you can't imagine!

MACLACHLAN—Did I understand you to say portentous or pretentious?

FLOSSIE—He was both.

MACLACHLAN—And both would be appropriately characteristic.

FLOSSIE—I protest you are a worse quiz than your friend, Mr. Leavenworth.

DUQUET—Come, now, the pedagogue calls this school to order. These big boys of mine are too much inclined to levity.

FLOSSIE—But seriously, I do honestly think that of all the professions that of a literary man is the most delightful and exclusive.

MACLACHLAN—Because the literary man is the man to whom is vouchsafed the delightful and exclusive privilege of starving to death?

FLOSSIE—Oh, it is not considered exclusive to starve to death now-a-days! Only stupid people do that. Are you always jesting, Mr. MacLachlan?

MACLACHLAN—Not more than I can help. But in my business of judging asinine productions and trying to discover merits where there are no merits, the responsibility sometimes proves too much and my tortured brain seeks frivolity in sheer despair.

LEAVENWORTH—Confidentially, I will inform you that in his early state of prehistoric man he was the head jester of the court.

FLOSSIE—(*Clapping her hands.*) Of anthropoid apes!

DUQUET—(*Rapping on the table.*) Order! I shall give this school recess if it doesn't brace up!

DAVIES—It's about time it was dismissed!

(*A knock sounds on the door. MacLachlan goes and opens it.*)

Enter Oressa Holliday, her threadbare garments wet, her hair disheveled, her hat shapeless. She is wildly haggard in appearance, confused in her manner. The rain driving against the window is distinctly heard.

Scene III

Oressa—(*Staggering in.*) Is Mr. Armand Duquet here?

Duquet—(*Coming forward.*) I am Armand Duquet.

Oressa—(*With wandering glances.*) The light . . . the warmth . . . it's like heaven! (*In short, broken sentences.*) I have tried to keep away—to the last moment—not to bother you. It was in my mind all along that if everything failed—I still had a last resort in you. I didn't intend only if I reached my extremity. There is nothing left me now. (*Smiles vaguely and sways forward uncertainly.*)

Flossie—(*Clasping her hands apprehensively.*) The woman is insane!

Duquet—(*To Oressa.*) I am at your service. Command me. You are wet. Permit me to help you with these soaking wraps.

Oressa—(*Murmuring, putting up her hand uncertainly to her hat.*) My hat—the pins . . . you don't remember . . . (*Smiles again. He takes her hat, removes her jacket.*)

Oressa—It is so cold. I have been in front here a long time trying to remember where I was.

Duquet—(*A great light breaking over his face.*) My God!

Oressa—You said come when I needed help. I didn't want to bother you. Please believe that. I am so sorry to have to bother you . . . I feel so queer—my feet light as though in league boots moving on air—my head so giddy—everything so far away! (*In a sink-*

ing voice.) I guess perhaps I'm—I'm dying! (*She reels forward and falls against his shoulder in a faint. Leavenworth, MacLachlan and Davies spring forward. They help Duquet lay her on the sofa. Duquet bends over her and chafes her hands.*)

MacLachlan—The poor girl is exhausted!

Duquet—(*In a quiet, clear voice.*) Carroll, bring me some brandy from the table. Mix it stiff! (*Leavenworth goes to the table and pours from the carafe a little water in the wine glass and fills it up with the brandy. Duquet raises Oressa's head and with a spoon Leavenworth forces a little of the brandy between her teeth.*)

Duquet—Careful! A little at a time—now more . . . that is better . . . again! Ah, she is coming now! Stand back, boys!

(*Oressa sighs deeply. With another long, quivering sigh she opens her eyes.*)

Oressa—Where am I?

Duquet—(*Slowly and distinctly.*) You are in the New York apartments of Armand Duquet the playwright, Miss Holliday, and among his friends.

Oressa—Oh, yes. He told me—I remember—And I am secure here with him. He wouldn't let any harm come to me because he is a gentleman. I can trust him . . . I thought I shouldn't be able to get here because things so many times became hazy and I forgot where I was. But I am safe at last . . . I told you, daddie, I wouldn't come back unless I made good—and I was determined not to be downed, to be pushed out—but to prove to you the real stuff you said wasn't in me was there . . . It was so disheartening, but

I gritted my teeth. I held on grimly. I tried so hard—you cannot have any idea of it. You would cry if you knew to what your poor girl had been reduced; working at anything she could find no matter how menial—sweeping offices, scrubbing floors—because she must eat. Sometimes I wondered if it could be really me brought so low, and I cried for myself. I did—I couldn't help it. My hands, look at them! (*Begins to weep.*)

DUQUET—(*Soothingly.*) There, there, Miss Holliday.

LEAVENWORTH—Her mind wanders.

FLOSSIE—(*With trembling excitement.*) The woman is insane.

DAVIES—She is delirious from starvation.

DUQUET—(*Comfortingly, and chafing her hands.*) There, there!

ORESSA—(*Weeping feebly.*) And I worked, and all through the long day I cheered myself with the promise evening would surely come and it would be mine to do the thing that loomed so big through the weary hours, the thing that counted, that meant something more than the drudgery of getting bread—that meant honor and independence! . . . And then I went everywhere, first to one and then to another, and the city grew bigger and bigger every day. And they put me off with this and that excuse. They were so polite, so smiling and cold. Sometimes they wouldn't even look at what I had brought them, though it was steeped in my heart's blood. And they put me off, and I went down, down to the lowest depths of hell. You had hard shifts in your young days, but you can

never understand, you can never know how desperate were these of mine.

DUQUET—(*Gently.*) Yes, I know, child.

ORESSA—It's such a relief to pour it out from my soul. The horror of it has been gathering so long. . . . I couldn't tell you that night. I thought when I had made good, my success would absorb all else and you would be so pleased with it as to be willing to forget, and you would be proud of me at last, as you are of the boys. (*Moves restlessly.*) You would forget any mistake I had made in what so triumphantly overshadowed it. But every day was harder, more wearing than the day before, and I thought I couldn't hold out until night. I would have to give it over, and every morning I braced myself anew for I must succeed. I must! Such a void here. Always so faint.

DUQUET—Carroll, bring that plate of sandwiches, will you? (*Leavenworth brings it from the table. Oressa springs up and snatches at the plate. A packet falls from her bosom heavily to the floor. Duquet picks it up and carries it to his writing-desk.*)

ORESSA—(*With a sharp laugh.*) You're so generous! I'm a little hungry. (*Tears and devours the sandwich like a famished dog. The men turn away their faces.*)

ORESSA—(*Eating ravenously.*) Oh, they are so good! More, more!

LEAVENWORTH—(*Aside to Duquet.*) Shall we give her more? (*Duquet shakes his head.*)

LEAVENWORTH—Not now, my child.

ORESSA—Oh, but I have not had half enough, and you with such an abundance of food will never miss

it. It is always the way! What little I can have only makes me more cravingly hungry. (*Begins to feebly weep again.*) I shall surely die of slow starvation!

DUQUET—(*To Flossie.*) Speak to her.

FLOSSIE—I don't know anything about her.

DUQUET—(*Sternly.*) It is enough you know she is ill and suffering. A woman understands how to console a woman. Please speak to her. (*He rings the bell.*)

FLOSSIE—(*Advancing.*) I am sorry, ma'am, that you are ill. It is so unfortunate to be ill among strangers. If you will tell us, ma'am, your address, we shall be only too glad to send you to your friends.

Reënter Willetts. Duquet speaks to him aside.

ORESSA—(*With a bewildered glance around.*) My friends? Yes. I am not ill. I feel quite well and strong again. (*Tries to rise. Leavenworth pushes her back on the sofa.*)

ORESSA—(*Struggling faintly.*) I will go at once.

LEAVENWORTH—Wait until you are stronger.

ORESSA—Yes, stronger. In a little while. (*She sinks back, closing her eyes.*)

WILLETTS—(*To Duquet.*) Yes, sir.

DUQUET—At once, understand.

WILLETTS—Yes, sir.

Exit Willetts.

DUQUET—(*To Flossie.*) We will keep our guest to-night.

FLOSSIE—But, Armand, it is best you send the poor woman to the hospital. She is going to be very ill, I fear. We can 'phone for the ambulance.

DUQUET—It is too wild a night for her, in her condition, to be sent out when she will be comfortable with you. I have made arrangements with Willetts for his wife to come and remain. She has had experience in nursing and she will take good care of Miss Holliday. You will not be put to any inconvenience.

Exit Duquet.

(*The men talk together.*)

Reënter Duquet, clad in his long ulster and hat in hand.

FLOSSIE—Oh, Armand, where are you going?

DUQUET—To the hotel for the night. I will be back in the morning.

FLOSSIE—And leave me here with a stranger? It is not proper she stays.

DUQUET—It is entirely and quite proper so long as I go away.

FLOSSIE—(*Pettishly.*) Oh, no!

(*Duquet goes to his writing-desk, unlocks and carefully puts the packet away in a drawer, and then relocks the drawer returning the key to his pocket.*)

(*The men talk together.*)

ORESSA—(*Muttering.*) It has been the great dream I have cherished my life long, the paramount dream toward which my faculties have converged, toward which my every effort and power of mind have been directed. My studies, my reading, my educational strivings, were all to the one end. Step by step, a little nearer each day, each month, each year have I drawn to my goal. Who dares say I shall fail?

LEAVENWORTH—Who is this girl?

DUQUET—She is a girl of rare and preëminent gifts,

who has come to the city to experience life, and owing to some unknown cause has fallen upon reverses. She is our sister artist.

LEAVENWORTH—She is a sister to John Chatterton, all right.

DUQUET—Come, fellows, Mrs. Willetts will be here soon and we will go.

FLOSSIE—I will not consent to your going, Armand.

MACLACHLAN—Aw, never mind, old man. I have an aunt who is my housekeeper——

DAVIES—(*Eagerly, and starting to the door.*) I'll take the girl to my mother. She'll be glad to receive her. I'll go out now and get a taxi if you'll just wait a minute!

DUQUET—Hold on!

ORESSA—(*Opening her eyes.*) What is all this? Oh, I must not be the cause of any trouble! I have done wrong in coming here to put anybody out. I will go straight away. I am all right again. (*Struggles to sit up.*)

DUQUET—(*In a clear, distinct voice, pushing her gently back, his hand on her brow.*) You have intrusted yourself to the keeping of your friends, who assume the responsibility for you whilst you are no longer able to exercise it for yourself. It is too wild a night for you to venture out in it again. You are welcome here so long as your need requires you to stay, and to-morrow when I return we shall see what arrangements we can make for your further comfort. (*Goes to Flossie and puts both hands on her shoulders.*) You are my guest and whilst you remain so, I expect you to be gracious to any other guest to whom I

choose to extend my hospitality. She is a lady; but even if she were not, her dire extremity entitles her to the fullest claims upon our humanity. Now be my dear little sister, and let your kind heart speak in compassion for her. (*Bends and kisses Flossie tenderly.*)

Exeunt Leavenworth, MacLachlan, Davies.

(*Oressa, her cheeks flushed, eyes closed, mutters incoherently. Duquet, folding his arms, stands over her, regarding her with a fixed, inscrutable look. The rain beats against the window.*)

Reënter Leavenworth, MacLachlan, Davies.

(*They are ready for the street and take their places just within the door. Duquet slowly moves back and takes up his hat. The men file out softly, and he follows. Flossie draws the portière leading to Duquet's private apartments. The heavy folds of velvet swing back to place as she disappears through them.*)

Curtain falls slowly.

ACT III

A parlor in Oressa Holliday's New York apartments. It is furnished with gilt couch and chairs, upholstered in dainty blue satin, blue silken hangings, a mahogany table and a gilt table. A delicate-hued Wilton is on the floor, and in one corner is a small open mahogany cabinet containing bric-a-brac. In the center of the mahogany table is placed a cut-glass rose bowl filled with American Beauties.

TIME—*Afternoon in March five months later.*

Virginia Holliday, wearing a well-fitting gown, is seated reading a letter.

SCENE I

VIRGINIA—I feel that this man is going to make us trouble, else why this attempt to force himself upon her attention at this late day? Now he petitions for an interview. This is the second letter he has sent her within two weeks, and more insistent. It is a matter of grave concern for the fact of his writing presages no good. And I have kept the news altogether from her. I cannot endure the thought of worrying her; she has had so much trouble and I would save her whatever annoyance it is within my power to spare her. What can he want of her after his own voluntary act of rejection and the lapse of over

three years? I fear I have done wrong in withholding the truth when it is plainly inevitable it is his purpose to reopen relations with her. Perhaps by warning her we might be enabled to make our escape. But where? He has heard of her success and found out her address, and to whatever retreat we fled he could sooner or later discover us. Her fame makes retirement impossible for any length of time. (*Rises and paces the floor in anxious thought. A light breaks over her face.*) Ah, an idea has come to me! And if I am bold and prompt enough I can carry it successfully off! I will bluff him down myself! He is a bully, but like all bullies is a coward and can be routed if one only has audacity sufficient to put over counter insolence.

Enter Maid.

MAID—Mr. Leavenworth. *Exit Maid.*

LEAVENWORTH—A fine March afternoon Miss Holliday. Is your sister at home? (*Advances and shakes hands.*)

VIRGINIA—Be seated, Mr. Leavenworth, while I call her.

Exit Virginia.

Enter Oressa, wearing a trailing afternoon house gown.

ORESSA—This is a compliment, Mr. Leavenworth, for a man so busy as I know you to be to spend time to call on a lady in the afternoon. First, I have to thank you for the beautiful roses here which make my little parlor a bower of fragrance.

LEAVENWORTH—I am glad they please you. It was a toss-up in my mind whether or no, the afternoon being so fine, you might be out, but I took the chance.

Oh, I am not so busy as you think! I have intervals when I feel myself as aimless and irresponsible as a gentleman with unlimited leisure on his hands. (*Seats himself and draws off his gloves.*) At these intervals I become uncomfortably conscious of the utter futility of my strivings. I wonder to what end I am working and denying myself. During these black moments the feeling that takes possession of me is of utter discouragement. It is the saddest sensation. You can't imagine!

ORESSA—That you, the strong and invincible, the self-sufficient, would succumb to the blues! Indeed I cannot.

LEAVENWORTH—They would properly be called blues. I suppose the real underlying cause is just plain dull, prosaic loneliness.

ORESSA—I am astonished. You, with all your friends and interests, to know what it means to be lonely!

LEAVENWORTH—But I do know. When a chap reaches my age he has got to a point where his professional activities and all the friends in the world fail to fill the void. He wants a place all his own that he can call home, and he wants to feel that some one is there who has a special interest in his incomings and outgoings. More, he wants to know that others who are coming after him are going to benefit by his toil and sacrifices. By the way, don't let me forget that I have something here I wanted you particularly to see. It is an article on your play in this week's New York *Nation* two and a half columns in length, and when a magazine of such varied interests

covering well nigh the entire political, educational and literary fields allows that space to any one subject, it goes without saying the subject is worth while.

ORESSA—(*Laughing.*) Favorable, I hope?

LEAVENWORTH—Obviously so. This is a brief review of your play by that great, surly Scotch mastiff, MacLachlan, who is a perfect terror to the rest of us because of his harsh strictures, but you apparently have wholly succeeded in taming him. It is wonderful! (*Points out to her the article.*)

ORESSA—(*Glancing over it.*) Thank you so much for bringing it. I will digest it at my leisure.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Laying the "Nation" on the mahogany table.*) You will find it clean cut, straight to the point, as is characteristic of Mac, but underlying it all a fine vein of artistic appreciation. He has discovered the beauties in your production all right and neglected no opportunity to descant on them.

ORESSA—He has been unfailingly good to me from the first, and I am sure I am grateful to him for his kindly interest; but so has every one of you placed me under eternal obligations for a consideration in the last degree.

LEAVENWORTH—The fellows regard you quite in the light of a mascot.

ORESSA—I believe there is conspiracy among you to spoil me. I shouldn't be much surprised next to hear I was elected to the Parnassus Circle. Honorary member, I suppose.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Laughing.*) There is some talk of it. If such a consummation should be effected, you can place the responsibility for it upon that young ad-

vocate of yours, Armand Duquet. He considers you his find first and therefore his special charge. He is promoting your interests at every opportunity.

ORESSA—My debt to him already is inestimable.

LEAVENWORTH—He is truly the most conscientious man to his sense of duty I ever knew, the most loyal to the obligations he assumes. (*Warmly.*) I do not exaggerate when I say his is one of the noblest and high spirited of characters, a nature innately chivalrous and generous. When a chap is in trouble Duquet's hand is always extended in aid. He would put himself out to the fullest extent, give to his last dollar to one in need, and do it all with a delicacy so fine as to divest the act of any trace of ostentation or charity. Not only is he high principled in his dealings with men, he is sincere and pure minded in his relations with women. So sensitive is his code of honor that he would consider it in the light of a degradation to his personal pride and self-respect to think ill of any woman, least of all to act basely toward her.

ORESSA—What a model husband he will make for some lucky girl!

LEAVENWORTH—His sister tells me there is a girl, beautiful and accomplished, whose father's estate adjoins theirs, of whom he has been very fond from childhood days.

ORESSA—Ah! You are beginning to interest me very much!

LEAVENWORTH—Whether they will marry or not remains to be demonstrated. Yet it is very likely they will, for these Southerners are clannish to the extreme, and hold fast to the old traditions of feminine

dependence and high breeding, and they incline strongly to the tenderly reared, sheltered women of their own part of the country. Charming as is his personality and eagerly as his presence would be welcomed by women of exclusive circles here, he has not mingled much in society, for his heart has been in his work. He has been so entirely engrossed with that as to have little time to spare outside. He has not been thinking of women in the concrete so much as of the airy creations of his own brain.

ORESSA—He has shaped his own ideal and is content with that.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Smiling.*) Well, he is only thirty-one years old, Miss Holliday, and a chap hasn't exhausted all his possibilities at that age, and I can safely predict that some day he will awaken to the fact that the evolutions of his fertile and romantic fancy, lovely and charming as they may be, are powerless to longer satisfy him. Then he will yearn for a live girl.

ORESSA—How funny that sounds! Are all girls live?

LEAVENWORTH—I have found them so.

ORESSA—(*Laughing nervously.*) But it sounds so funny.

LEAVENWORTH—Well, I am an outspoken fellow. Now, Miss Holliday, you are a woman of the world, and the knowledge you gained there has shown you that all men are not possessed of the soul of Armand Duquet. Your experience of three years on the seamy side of life has doubtless given some unpleasant jolts to your ideals of manhood, shattered many cherished

illusions, in short, proved to you that many men are lacking altogether in any such equipment as white wings.

ORESSA—But that they are plentifully supplied with horns instead.

LEAVENWORTH—Exactly. Some longer and more pointed than others. When a man has lived a good long while in this world, in round numbers let us say forty years, he has had opportunity, if he is of the mind, to sample pretty freely the various brands of amusement—dissipation, frivolity and general foolishness—offered to his experimentation. Some chaps of the writing fraternity think they must not only drink deeply of the cup of life, but drain it to its utter dregs in order to write with comprehensive power in a big elemental way. Again, a young fellow just starting over the threshold, stirred by the everlasting curiosity that in a good sense is the inspiring motive of all knowledge, is eager to learn what it contains. He wants to know what evil is like and is irresistibly drawn toward it because that which is tabooed is always more attractive than what is free and open. When I was in college I was no better or worse than the average run of pampered young puppies indulged in a too generous allowance by injudicious and doting fathers; when I went abroad to complete my education intellectually and morally, I found on the continent that restraint was sneered at, virtue held as of slight importance and conduct that in our good, Puritanical atmosphere was looked upon as downright scandal, was regarded as quite a matter of course. Chaps with money who wanted to enjoy the domestic comforts to

which they were accustomed at home, set up on a limited scale with a house-keeper. I soon entered into a business transaction with one of these young housekeeper's mothers, who exhibited the customary financial acumen. I do not claim that I was in love with this girl, as a chap would be with the woman he intended choosing for a wife, but she was amiable and adaptable and I grew fond of her, and when the three years stipulated by the compact was at an end, I did not send her away empty handed. My conscience absolves me of any injustice. I dealt with absolute fairness by her; it was from first to last a straight transaction. As for myself, I can say I was a steadier, more temperate youth for that experience. It is not pleasant for a man to dig back fifteen years or more into his past and make confession of it to the woman he is desirous of winning. But I tell you this, Miss Holliday, because I think it is right a chap should let her know of his acts, even if that knowledge is likely to injure his case. He should be honest with her and open; that is the part of square dealing. Such is my code of honor. And I can say with a clear conscience that since that time I have been a reasonably decent fellow.

ORESSA—Am I to understand that you are making me a proposal of marriage?

LEAVENWORTH—You are to understand exactly that. Do you think you could learn to care a little for a chap who admits he has been no saint, but who nevertheless will make you the deuce of a fine husband and good family man?

ORESSA—(*Rising.*) I do not expect you to be a

saint, it is sufficient that you are a man with a sterling sense of honor.

LEAVENWORTH—Good! I see you are woman of the world enough to have gained discernment to appreciate the temptations to which a man's nature makes him liable.

ORESSA—I do not care what has been your past before I ever knew you; it is only the present with which any woman has a right to be concerned.

LEAVENWORTH—And I promise you, you will have no occasion to find fault with that present or the future that is on the way if you become my wife. Come, what are you going to say to me?

ORESSA—(*Moving restlessly about the room.*) Is it because of my ability to write that you have been drawn toward me?

LEAVENWORTH—I admire you for that ability as any man naturally admires the efficiency of a gifted woman that enables her to make a notable achievement, and I am confident you will do me credit. I should be more than proud of you. I both can and shall esteem it a privilege to help you to attain to a fuller consummation of your genius. And it will be my pleasure to convert my larger experience to your service. (*Smiling.*) You are jealously apprehensive lest the woman be overlooked for the bluestocking. But do not fear! You have other means than the intellectual with which to make yourself felt. I have grown to love you for your own pretty little feminine airs unlike those of any one else, for the turn of your head, the grace of your movements, for the music of your voice, the soft ripple of that laugh,—in short,

just for your personal little self. A woman like you, so brilliant and attractive, without any near relatives, ought not to stand alone and unprotected in the world. Now, won't you consent to give me a trial so that I can prove that I can take good care of you?

ORESSA—(*Pausing in her walk and looking at him over her shoulder.*) I am deeply appreciative of the honor you have done me in making this offer. But it has come so unexpectedly I cannot give an answer on the minute. I must have a little time for reflection. It wouldn't be fair to either of us if I answered without consideration.

LEAVENWORTH—(*With an engaging smile.*) Aren't you going to give me just a teenty-tawnty ray of hope? (*Comes up behind her.*) Are you going to send me away in utter suspense?

ORESSA—Perhaps it would not be to your eventual good that I give you hope.

LEAVENWORTH—Nonsense, when it is within your power to make me the happiest of men! You play with me, child. But then you are like the rest of your sex, a tantalizing little coquette who makes herself more adorable by holding off.

ORESSA—You would not say that if you understood me. I am one of the most serious of women.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Taking her hand.*) Then be serious in your determination to accept me. Is there any one else?

ORESSA—I have learned of none other.

LEAVENWORTH—Ah, then I can take courage! (*Takes up his hat.*) Every minute whilst I am gone I am going to give you absent treatment so that

you will have ready a favorable answer for me on my return. (*Coaxingly.*) Won't you let me kiss you just once?

ORESSA—(*Drawing away.*) Certainly not. I have not made any decision yet, remember.

LEAVENWORTH—Right.

Exit.

ORESSA—I have made up my mind to be happy. It is my right to reach up and take what hangs within my grasp. What are money and independence and fame without love? Empty, cold and valueless, a mockery to a starving spirit. I will put the past behind me as though it had never been. (*Paces the floor with agitation.*) I will forswear myself, repudiate all! I *will* be happy.

Enter Duquet.

(*He stands silent regarding her. As she turns in her walk she perceives him.*)

SCENE II

DUQUET—(*Bowing low.*) Why are you so perturbed?

ORESSA—(*With a quivering smile.*) Perturbed? Oh, no! I am just acting out a scene in the new play I am devising.

DUQUET—It must be a strenuous one for it is causing you some mental disturbance, I reckon. Speaking of plays reminds me there is a critique of your last in——

ORESSA—(*Archly.*) *The Nation.*

DUQUET—No; it is to be in the coming *North American Review* and it is by Davies.

ORESSA—You men are determined the world shall hear of me. *The Nation* is by MacLachlan. Mr. Leavenworth came to bring it to me. It is there on the table.

DUQUET—(*Laying down his hat.*) Ah! Good stuff? I met him on the steps as I was coming up.

ORESSA—Whenever he hears of anything concerning my work he hastens with it to me. He is, I believe, as proud of any commendation accorded me as though it were given himself.

DUQUET—Staunch old Levvy! Though whimsical, making jest of serious things, which he thinks is the mark of a man of the world, or else propounding revolutionary doctrines from sheer perversity to contradict his hearers, he has the tenderest of feelings and is the best friend man or woman ever had.

ORESSA—Be moderate. He has been sounding your praises and if you now begin on the same tack I shall certainly think there is a conspiracy between you to crack yourselves up.

DUQUET—Even at that risk I cannot extol Carroll beyond his desert. He is my closest friend, Miss Oressa, and I look up to him as to an elder brother. He is, in fact, as dear to me as an elder brother would have been if I had been granted such a blessing. From the beginning of my meeting him here in New York when I was but twenty-four he took me under his protection, gave me invaluable suggestions, and introduced me to the literary coterie. I found myself in the midst of the brilliant wits and intellectuals gathered from every part of the country, before I had won any legitimate claim to be there at all.

ORESSA—You literary men are so united, so loyal to one another's interests. It is beautiful!

DUQUET—You think so? It's the free masonry of art. But enough of shop. I have brought something here personal to myself. (*Puts his hand in his breast pocket.*) I have told you about my Virginia home and I thought perhaps you might like to see a representation of it.

ORESSA—I am more than curious.

DUQUET—Well then. (*Sits down beside her on the tête and shows her a photograph.*)

ORESSA—(*With enthusiasm.*) Oh, what a splendid mansion! And with what an air of stability and dignity those spacious verandas and solidly supporting pillars have invested it! (*Holds the photograph from her and looks at it admiringly.*) Do you know, Mr. Duquet, it is quite as my fancy had conceived it? I can easily portray the majestic interior, the lofty rooms with their massive furniture, so cool, so quiet, so elegant, emanating an atmosphere of age and stately conservatism.

DUQUET—It is pretty nearly a hundred years old.

ORESSA—A rare privilege indeed to dwell in a home so hallowed by association and of such picturesque interest! What wonder your mind was filled with beautiful images and visions when your days were spent in those halls of romance? I can also picture the extensive park with the luxuriant trees environing it. I like to compare your youth as it must have glided so serenely along, to a river moving with a grace soft and smooth and free between banks of bending branches and thickly clustering foliage, whose

shadows made a cool retreat, the blue dome flecked with fleecy white, curving in benediction from above! Or, I like to think of your young life in its onward flow as resembling the rich, harmonious rhythm of a noble song! Is that extravagant?

DUQUET—(*Smiling.*) If you are prodigal with your fanciful similitudes, I assure you it is not unpleasing.

ORESSA—(*Softly and contemplatively.*) I can see you in the long ago when you were the merest lad, slight and boyish of form, your abstracted gaze fixed in revery whilst your spirit, free, roamed far away over aerial castles. The days were just a succession of witching wonders and surprises and delights like the novel and extraordinary happenings in fairies' abodes, for you had not awakened to realities' meaning. You were living instead in the enchanted land of illusions. You were content to love the blue sky with the changing shapes, the iridescent colors of its clouds; you discovered a rapture in the bewildering and gorgeous moods Nature exhibited, for even commonplace objects after passing through the alembic of your poet's soul would have been glorified. How much greater the inspiration you derived from Nature in her perfect forms! The most ordinary incidents of life in the crucible of your imagination would have been transmuted into golden romance. How much greater the inspiration from conditions that were absolutely ideal! (*More absently and laughing low.*) I can see you a little later, a slender stripling when to childhood's sumptuous creative power that converted the every day world into a domain of magic, came also

that of reflection. Your brooding thoughts turned on the great mystery of things and as you mused, your astonishment and curiosity grew apace. You were becoming conscious of your own importance as a part of this strange and inexplicable scheme and realized that responsibility was devolving upon you. And this awakening was not unbecoming to you as also were not dark eyes and dark hair ever growing darker. (*She laughs low and caressingly.*) We could not say that, like Byron you were dashing, for you were far too dreamy for that. But being good to look upon and with manners gracious, it is certain you did not lack effectiveness. After a while in order to receive the necessary experience, of which as yet you were ignorant, you go away to mingle with many others in distant scenes, but through these years of study and social intercourse your exaltation of soul, your enthusiasms, you preserved as precious possessions. Nor did you let go of your high ideal of service to be rendered to the world. *Noblesse Oblige!* Now, in due course of time, this fair promise was brought to pass, these stages of development culminated in fulfilment, for, in short, the seeds of all these thoughts, these reflections, these passions for beauty and truth, burst into blossom and gave forth rich perfume; and the world rejoices in the poet and dramatist, Armand Duquet. (*Laughs musically and claps her hands gleefully.*)

DUQUET—(*Knitting his brows in humorous perplexity.*) You sibyl, one moment, you talk to me as from the garnered experience of a hundred years; the next you are a gay mischievous girl, and I am

half inclined to believe that under cover of praise you are ridiculing me!

ORESSA—Not for a moment. But let me tell you this. What has most impressed me about your past life is that the conditions surrounding you from the beginning have been in every way favorable to the fullest bringing forth of your peculiar gifts. It isn't every boy who can muse and dream in a place that retains the atmosphere of an oriental magician's palace with dusky forms flitting about! I suppose your people once had any number of slaves?

DUQUET—In the old days, yes. My grandfather was one of the biggest plantation owners of the South. Though my father was a mere boy when the Civil War broke out he enlisted at once in the Confederate ranks and rose by successive steps until at the end of the struggle he had won the title of colonel. He was killed about four years ago from a fall from his horse.

ORESSA—Then you became the head of the family?

DUQUET—That responsibility descended to me. I wish, Miss Oressa, you might meet my mother. You could not help loving her.

ORESSA—I should stand in such awe of her because I am sure she is a grande dame.

DUQUET—But so gracious and serene. You two would, I am sure, become very fond of one another. Why cannot you come and make us a visit?

ORESSA—Oh, I couldn't think of such a thing! It wouldn't do.

DUQUET—Will you tell me why?

ORESSA—Young ladies don't visit young men at their homes when unacquainted with the family. It

wouldn't be proper.

DUQUET—If it were in order to become acquainted, how then?

ORESSA—(*Shaking her head.*) It isn't considered good form.

DUQUET—Oh, bother form! A girl like you can afford to dispense with the formalities ordinary women have to observe.

ORESSA—You mean because I have a reputation as a literary woman I am to be accounted a Bohemian?

DUQUET—I mean you can afford to dispense with formalities because you are both superior and rare and by reason of that are lifted clear of the boundaries that restrict commonplace people. If my mother should write you she was desirous of becoming acquainted with you and should extend an invitation for you to come, I can't see why you should refuse it.

ORESSA—But she will not extend it.

DUQUET—Yes, she will if I ask her.

ORESSA—You are very unconventional. Do you know that, Mr. Duquet?

DUQUET—Don't say Mr. Duquet. Say Armand. Don't you think our friendship has been sufficiently tested to venture on a little familiarity?

ORESSA—Yours has, most certainly.

DUQUET—Oh, don't talk of that.

ORESSA—I can't help talking of it when I realize so fully that whatever I have achieved I owe to you.

DUQUET—And I rejoin you owe it to your gifts.

ORESSA—They would not have availed me, if it had not been for you, for I was powerless to get them recognized.

DUQUET—Sooner or later they would have made themselves felt and demanded recognition. (*Lightly.*) Power, like murder, you know, will out.

ORESSA—(*Shaking her head.*) I thought so once, but I learned from bitter experience that the highest work is the most difficult of any work to win its way to public notice and favor. I should have remained either a discouraged woman, my heart eaten out with the disappointment of futile striving, of deferred hope and of neglect, or would have died from actual want and despair, if it had not been for you.

You succored me when I was starving; you took my play and gained the ear of the managers; you put it in rehearsal and saw to its presentation, giving to it the same conscientious and exacting care you would have given to your own. Oh, I know the claim you have on my gratitude!

DUQUET—(*Playfully.*) Perhaps I shall reveal myself as thoroughly mercenary and ask an unwarrantable compensation for the wonderful things you say I have done for you.

ORESSA—Surely, could there be any compensation which I should hesitate to render?

DUQUET—(*Gravely.*) Even to the forfeit of yourself?

ORESSA—Would it be a forfeit?

DUQUET—That is as you look at it.

ORESSA—(*In an agitated voice.*) Oh, I am uncertain of you and of myself! You must not say another word! (*Rises.*)

DUQUET—(*Gently.*) But yes. (*Takes her hand.*) Won't you remain here just a moment beside me and

let me talk with you a little? (*Bends his head low over her hand.*) You are very elusive, Oressa. I have been impressed by a sense of aloofness, of reserve in you from the beginning of my association following that night you came to me. I felt the presence of a spiritual barrier which you interposed between yourself and me, and if I ever tried to advance beyond a certain point you retreated. You have kept that distance, discouraging any attempt on my part to draw nearer to you. Is it that you doubt me, or is it that you distrust men in general?

ORESSA—Oh, no, no! I do not doubt you!

DUQUET—It has been my wish to be your friend.

ORESSA—And I so consider you.

DUQUET—But you do not give me your full confidence. That is the proof of friendship and that you trust me. You have seen how I was inclining toward you, growing to love you——

ORESSA—(*With agitation.*) But love is the end of friendship.

DUQUET—(*Ardently.*) Dear child, it is the beginning of loyalty the sweetest, of devotion to one another's service the most consummate. . . . They say women know these things by intuition, but men grope their way to the knowledge. The mystery of it has been slow unfolding itself and the understanding so long coming has thoroughly upset me. If I try to concentrate my mind on work, it is your fair face I see on the page. I am restless, distracted. Even in the midst of my friends I am depressed, without interest in their conversation or concerns. Other women, however charming they may be, do not divert me. I

am consumed with longing to see you, and when I cannot be with you, to dwell in fancy with you. I walk my room, living over and over every word you have spoken, beholding from the photograph of my memory the play of expression over your features, the look of your speaking eyes. My thoughts when I am alone are occupied with you to the exclusion of everything else. I go to my rest, there to think of you where there is no interruption. I fall asleep to dream of you.

And in the silent hours when I awaken I put out my passionate arms and pray that you might be by my side, that in them I could enfold you close, close on my heart and seal your pure lips with my kisses! Oh, my dear, my sweet, my innocent lambkin, you must not be angry with me for telling you this, for this is love and what love means. . . . It is a feverish intoxication, a delirious ecstasy, a tyranny, a madness where hope and yearning desire alternate with suspense and despair! If I had ever felt this before, it would not come with such force. (*In an appealing voice.*) Oh, Oressa, I am so hard hit! (*Rises abruptly and paces the floor.*)

ORESSA—And have you never cared for a girl before?

DUQUET—Not seriously—never like this! (*Puts his hand to his forehead.*) It is so strange, so overwhelming! I have fancied,—admired them,—some at a distance to whom I have never spoken. For a brief time I have been attracted by this one, my pulses lightly stirred by the beauty, the grace of that one because external charms fail not in their appeal. From boyhood my labor of artistry and of joy has been in cre-

ating fair and lovely beings,—dream girls,—pure as cold. But, in my most ardent imagination, I little expected that the reality would so surpass my vision, for it was Venus who gave warm, throbbing life to my ideal. And you who are this Galatea, you have gripped my very soul and I suffer the torments of the damned in the suspense of not knowing whether I am to master, to obtain you as my own! Are you going to have some pity? (*Puts his hand, with a strong, convulsive movement, on her shoulder.*)

ORESSA—You are too precipitate, you have not given me time to learn my own mind.

DUQUET—(*Hoarsely.*) Time? Is that an excuse to put me off, to get away from the issue? Do not play with me! (*Puts both shaking hands on her shoulders.*) It will not be well, it will not be well!

ORESSA—(*Gently.*) Fiery, extravagant boy! Do you think it is in me to so meanly recompense all your goodness to me by trifling with your affections?

DUQUET—(*In an intense voice.*) I want no recompense, I want a free gift!

ORESSA—I ask you to be patient!

DUQUET—I am a hot-headed fool and I beg your pardon. In your virgin innocence, of course you have not as yet experienced the dominating mastery of this great passion, been drawn and held in the thrall of its tyrannous absorption! Why should I expect it? And still, being a woman, you must in your thoughts have speculated on it, have imagined, wondered what it might be like. So let me teach it to you. You are not unwilling?

ORESSA—Do not urge me any further. Now go

away.

DUQUET—I am pleading my happiness, Oressa; I am praying you to grant me the greatest boon in the gift of your sex. You are a woman with a belief in the ultimate regeneration of man, and convinced that the efforts of every individual, however small, help toward that end; your intellectual standards are of the very highest, nothing less than the best will satisfy you; you have a purpose in all that you do, and your Art is the servant of that purpose. Do you know that in this world of tragic misfits it happens just once in a hundred years that two people of the same ideals, the same aims, meet and come together? And the result of a union like that is a happiness that is immortal, for happiness founded on such affinities defies the vicissitudes of life and time.

I want you, my darling, not only because of your physical self,—the woman in you that all men love,—but because each of us is a complement to the other, and hand in hand we two together will be able to attain to the highest consummation of our powers.

ORESSA—My friend, by the memory of your generous past to me, I entreat you not to plead this case any further.

DUQUET—(*Taking up his hat.*) I am a selfish brute, and I humbly crave your indulgence.

ORESSA—(*Earnestly.*) But before you go, I want you to know that in those three years I lived in this city unprotected and forlorn, amidst difficulties well-nigh unendurable, I was absolutely honest. I want you, if the occasion should any time come when you might think harshly of me, to remember that.

DUQUET—Of course, I know it. Why do you need to impress such a fact upon my memory? It goes without saying that however great might be the miseries, the temptations besetting you, you would be true to yourself. What sort of a fellow would I be to love you and not have implicit faith in you? (*Bends down and kisses her hand. Raises his eyes with a supplicating look. In an eloquent voice.*) Be generous to me, Oressa.

Exit Duquet.

(*Oressa stands motionless, in deep thought. Takes up the photograph, gazes at it long and earnestly. Lays it back on the table. Makes several turns around the room. Sits down, supporting her chin on her hand.*)

Enter Flossie Duquet, in a smart calling gown, wearing a fur coat of blended squirrel, trimmed with ermine, a chic hat of squirrel, edged with ermine, a white ermine boa and carrying an ermine muff.

SCENE III

FLOSSIE—Miss Holliday, I believe?

ORESSA—(*Lifting her head.*) Yes.

FLOSSIE—(*Advancing.*) I don't know as you remember me, ma'am. I am Miss Flossie Duquet. You came one night late, when you were ill, to my brother's apartments and fainted there, ma'am, and were quite delirious afterwards.

ORESSA—(*Rising.*) Yes, indeed, I remember you and the occasion. (*Puts out her hand.*)

FLOSSIE—(*With a little staccato shake from a*

raised wrist.) I just passed him going from here, but he was walking with his head down, as he most always does, and as I was in the Cadillac, he did not see me and I am right glad of it.

ORESSA—That is odd you should be glad not to have your brother recognize you. (*Courteously.*) Won't you be seated, Miss Duquet?

FLOSSIE—I might as well, I suppose. (*Sinks in a chair, with a deep sigh.*) Well, it is not so odd, after all, when I tell you, ma'am, he has been urging me ever so long to come and make a call on you. And I have kept putting it off on one excuse and another and I don't want him to know now that I have come at last, because he will ask me what was said and done, and whether my call was pleasant, and I am really afraid it won't be pleasant, ma'am.

ORESSA—(*Smiling.*)—I will do my part toward having it so. Why can't it be pleasant? Why not you and I become good friends?

FLOSSIE—(*Shaking her head.*) I fear that is not possible. . . . I think the world of him, ma'am. He's the best brother a girl ever had—always considering my comfort and my pleasure. And he will buy anything I ask for, he is that indulgent. He gave me this fur coat and this set of ermine and they cost a right smart sum of money, ma'am. He is just that good to us all—to my mother, to my younger sisters, of whom one is twelve and one fourteen. He takes the care of business off my mother's shoulders. She asks his advice on every difficult matter, and he is always so helpful. He sees to my sisters' education and selects the seminaries they attend, and he will take them

abroad, as he did me when I came out. We just couldn't get along without him, for we depend on him for everything.

He is an ideal big brother, never scolding one or flying into a passion, but patient and kind whatever the provocation, and I don't want him annoyed more than is necessary. You mustn't tell him I came here. Will you, ma'am?

ORESSA—If you do not desire it; certainly not.

FLOSSIE—I am sorry, you know, to say anything unpleasant to you in your own home, that is likely to grieve or offend you, ma'am. Please believe me, I didn't come here to insult or to affront you. That is far from my thoughts. I came from a motive of strict necessity. For a long time past I am sure he has been thinking seriously about you and I really fear he has got to that point he is intending to make you a proposal, ma'am, of marriage. I really fear so. And I have come here to ask you in the event he does, to refuse him.

ORESSA—(*Gently.*) You evidently consider that in the event he did make me a proposal of marriage and I accepted it, it would be a great misfortune to you.

FLOSSIE—To us all, ma'am.

ORESSA—Will you tell me quite frankly why you would so consider it?

FLOSSIE—Oh, ma'am, I am so relieved you are mild! For people to become red in the face and talk loud is so vulgar, and I dread scenes above everything!

ORESSA—(*Smiling.*) Nothing is gained by getting angry in a case of this sort. It is better we talk quietly and unreservedly together in order to get one an-

other's point of view and therefore to understand one another better.

FLOSSIE—I am beginning to like you already, ma'am. You are so different from what I thought.

ORESSA—And now will you tell me what objections you have to me? Is it because I am a writing woman?

FLOSSIE—Partly that. We are very conservative where I come from, ma'am, you would say old-fashioned, and we do not approve of the idea of women going outside earning their livings in offices and such places, mixing in men's affairs, trying to vote, making themselves public in any way and becoming emancipated. I have heard and I can see that you are right clever and self-reliant. Still I am sure my mother would be most strongly antagonistic to you just on account of your being so independent and public. Then, Miss Holliday, I made up my mind at once, that night you came to my brother in such extremity, you could not be a lady for ladies do not get in predicaments of that sort.

ORESSA—Might it not be possible a lady could experience misfortune? Do you not think I must have come from a family of some substantiality in order to have received a fair education?

FLOSSIE—(*Shaking her head.*) But your family could not be select, ma'am, or they would have been more choice of you. We are one of the oldest families of the South and Armand is our head and we expect him, of course, to marry a girl of distinguished birth, of high breeding, one who has been exclusive in her up-bringing. It would break my mother's heart if he entered into a mesalliance. No one seems to know

anything really definite about your past, what has been your origin or your rearing.

ORESSA—Do you not think that people themselves are an exemplification of their rearing?

FLOSSIE—I suppose they are. But, oh, dear, there is so much to complicate things! I do wish it might have been different. But we can't get away from the ideas to which we have been brought up. We are bound down to them. You see how it is, ma'am?

ORESSA—Yes, I quite see how it is.

FLOSSIE—And you don't blame me?

ORESSA—Why, no!

FLOSSIE—It is lovely of you to be so reasonable. And you are sure you are not angry?

ORESSA—I am only very sorry. I should have liked so much to have had you for my little friend.

FLOSSIE—And I should love to be your friend if it were not for the fear of being your sister-in-law.

ORESSA—I have had so few girl friends in my life, and here I am without any. It is hard for a woman to be deprived of the companionship of her own sex.

FLOSSIE—It is terrible. Oh, I am so sorry for you!

ORESSA—Do you know, you are very artless and innocent? And you look so girlish and pretty with those pure white furs. (*Puts her hand on her shoulder.*)

FLOSSIE—(*Delightedly.*) Do I? (*Holds out her muff.*) Just feel, Miss Holliday, how soft and rich it is!

ORESSA—(*Holding the muff to her cheek.*) It is beautiful! This is royalty's fur!

FLOSSIE—And the dear little black tails—aren't they

cute? To think of the delicate pretty creatures just living for me, ma'am! I am so glad you admire them!

ORESSA—(*Smoothing the fur.*) Who could help it?

FLOSSIE—(*Impulsively taking the scarf from her neck.*) And now I want you to have them.

ORESSA—Oh, no, no, no! I couldn't think of such a thing!

FLOSSIE—(*Pressing them on her.*) I shall be offended if you refuse me.

ORESSA—Impulsive child! Why, I can't take your furs!

FLOSSIE—Oh, yes, but you will! It is a downright slight to reject a gift, and I shall be right offended. It has become so late in the season and I cannot wear them, you know, in the South. They will only be laid away in moth balls. (*In sweet entreaty.*) Please, please! (*Oressa turns her head and breaks into a deep sob.*)

FLOSSIE—(*Dropping the furs and throwing her arms around Oressa's neck.*) I am ashamed to have grieved you so. Forgive me!

ORESSA—It is nothing, nothing!

FLOSSIE—Oh, I hate myself for an odious creature!

Reënter Maid, followed by Almon Merritt.

MAID—A gentleman for you, Miss Holliday.

FLOSSIE—I must go now. You have been very nice and patient, ma'am. Good-by! *Exit Flossie.*

SCENE IV

ORESSA—(*Recoiling.*) Almon Merritt! What are you doing here?

MERRITT—(*With a conciliatory smile.*) I fear you are not agreeably surprised, but I hope you will be more reconciled to my presence when you learn my errand. First let me say I have come to offer my congratulations on your good fortune. You have certainly made a wonderful hit with the public. I might have known it was in you, though, to do some big thing. I have written you twice, once for the purpose of conveying my felicitations and yesterday asking for an appointment. As I got no response to either, I took silence for consent.

ORESSA—I have not received any letters from you and if I had I should have declined giving a man admittance into my house who has proved himself utterly lacking in principle and honor.

MERRITT—(*In slow, propitiatory accents and always speaking low.*) I don't blame you for condemning and resenting my conduct. I admit that I treated you abominably and that I deserve all the reproaches you see fit to heap upon me.

ORESSA—(*Coldly.*) It is not my intention to heap reproaches upon you. It would be only a waste of my time to accuse or to upbraid one from whom I am completely alienated. My wish is to be spared any dealings with you whatsoever, and I ask you to leave here at once.

MERRITT—Wait a little, first, and give me a chance to explain myself.

ORESSA—There is no explanation possible. You showed yourself a knave, deliberately tricking and deceiving me and casting me aside without mercy when you found a newer fancy.

MERRITT—(*Insistently.*) Give me a chance to tell you what I purpose for you.

ORESSA—It is not of the slightest significance what you purpose for me. I do not want to reopen any relations with you or treat with you a moment. I only ask you to take yourself away.

MERRITT—I say, I don't blame you for being spunky, with the provocation I gave you. I guess Fate evens up things once and awhile. At any rate, I got my reward for my usage of you. I couldn't get along with that woman on any terms. She was a termagant, a she-devil.

ORESSA—(*Icily.*) I am not interested in your domestic infelicities.

MERRITT—I wouldn't expect you to be if they had not ended in an opening for you and me again and an opportunity for us to settle our differences. To be plain, I got a divorce from her, Oressa, and I am a free man once more, and I have come back to you.

ORESSA—If that is your errand here, it is quite futile. You have proved yourself a scoundrel and I wouldn't take you back if you were the last man on earth.

MERRITT—(*Sulkily.*) Oh, come, now! Haven't you lashed me enough, when I tell you I am willing to make you reparation, to square it all up?

ORESSA—That time has long passed.

MERRITT—You are talking just for the sake of showing your resentment for the injuries you received at my hands, and I have already acknowledged my culpability. So what's the use of keeping up this hostile attitude? Let us get down to business and adjust

these difficulties. Barring my offense to you, I am not the worst fellow in the world; I am neither idle nor dissolute, only a little over-susceptible where women are concerned. Now I make you a straight offer: I will marry you and treat you to the very best of my ability. Come, what do you say?

ORESSA—(*In a ringing voice.*) I say, I decline that offer unconditionally.

MERRITT—(*With astonishment.*) You decline it?

ORESSA—There is no misery on earth that a woman could be called upon to bear equal to the misery of being tied for life to a man in whom she feels not the slightest confidence and for whom she has lost the last vestige of respect!

When I was obscure, almost penniless, you considered me of the least importance; you valued my womanhood so lightly, you took so little thought of my pride, you were so indifferent to my feelings, that at your first caprice you discarded me without one qualm of conscience. What were my humiliation, my sufferings to you? What did you care if the spirit of hope were crushed from my young heart, if my sacred claims upon your honor were abjured? The first rush of your passion had spent itself, you wearied of me, and so I was ruthlessly sacrificed to the later fancy. You put upon me the supremest affront man can put upon woman, and so lost were you to any sense of moral integrity or justice that you failed to realize the enormity of the outrage. Now that I have struggled and labored in sweat and agony for a foothold on the ladder of success and by my utmost efforts gained a measure of independence and distinction, you are ready to share

my prosperity with me. I say it cannot be!

MERRITT—You belong to me by every right of earth. In the sight of heaven, you are mine, mine only!

ORESSA—No longer! Your own act severed every claim you had upon me. You made my past a hateful thing to my memory. With relentless hand, you tore away the delicate veil of my illusions; you robbed my secluded and contemplative life of the sweet glamour that alone brightened it; you rudely awakened me to the harsh reality of things, of men's sordid selfishness and meanness, of the world's cruelty.

MERRITT—(*With an impatient gesture.*) That is dead and done with. The future is ours in which to redeem all our mistakes.

ORESSA—Not ours; it is *mine* to do with as I will! Do you think, then, that any reparation on your part can restore the broken enchantments,—bring back the fervor and glow of youth's lost enthusiasms, can make amends for the crushing and beating out of girlhood, can compensate for the robbing of virginity's sacred belief in God's goodness and justice, its divine faith in man's chivalry? Oh, there can be no reparation from you!

MERRITT—I have made you a perfectly legitimate offer. I stand ready to repair the wrong I have done you.

ORESSA—And I tell you, it is irreparable. Without scruples, you left me in a wretched dilemma, dependent on my own resources to extricate myself as best I could. You exposed me to the tender mercies of the world and you had no care whether I lived or died. I feel toward you nothing save deepest abhorrence and

contempt.

MERRITT—(*In repressed tones.*) You reject my proposal, then?

ORESSA—(*Turning from him.*) I have said so.

MERRITT—And you will not reconsider your decision?

ORESSA—(*Moving away.*) It is final.

MERRITT—You take a high and mighty hand with me because you are puffed up with your success here and exult in your independence. You think the world is yours to order as you will and to take from it whatever you desire, with your pick of admirers and husbands. But because you have fallen on good times, you can't afford to be too independent. It might be the part of policy to take into account that there are certain facts in my possession which, in the event I chose to divulge them, might prove a set-back to this independence of yours.

ORESSA—(*With a snake-like movement rearing up her head.*) You threaten me?

MERRITT—(*In restrained tones.*) I have not said so. But if there is no other way to bring you to reason, I shall be forced to employ coercive measures, for I tell you, right here, I am determined no other man save myself shall have you.

(*Oressa looks at him steadily with glittering eyes, drawing in deep, labored breaths.*)

MERRITT—It would not be pleasant for a young woman who has so lately made her début on the stage of affairs to have some unsavory truths dragged into the light. It might lessen the public esteem in which she is held, even make her notorious.

(*Oressa, breathing with deep gasps, clenches and unclenches her hands.*)

MERRITT—I promise you, if you treat me decently, you will receive kindness at my hands, but if you persist in this attitude of insolence, by heaven, there is not anything I will stop at to bring you to terms!

ORESSA—(*Hoarsely.*) Not myself or anything belonging to me can you legally touch. Oh, I thank my God for that every day of my life!

MERRITT—Not even your name, the good opinion in which you are held? (*Smiling.*) A woman who has once loved a man is never again quite mistress of herself. (*With a sudden change to tenderness.*) Come, now, Oressa, I have no desire to persecute you, only you must not set up such stubborn opposition to me. Why should we two play at cross purposes when it is to your advantage to be on an amicable footing with me? You cannot afford to make me your enemy. Be a little conciliatory, a little tractable. Why, I can remember when you were more yielding. (*Draws her to him. With wild strength, she breaks from him.*)

MERRITT—Still refractory? I am either for or against you. Think twice on that.

Reënter Maid with Leavenworth.

MAID—Gentleman, Miss.

LEAVENWORTH—(*To Oressa.*) I meant to have brought you a box of sweets this afternoon, Miss Holliday, but it slipped my mind. (*Perceiving Merritt.*) So I thought I would just run in a moment to fetch it.

ORESSA—But stay, it is my wish, Mr. Leavenworth. And let me make known to you an acquaintance of

mine in the old days before I came to New York,—Mr. Merritt.

LEAVENWORTH—(*Advancing and shaking hands heartily with Merritt.*) I am sure any one who is an acquaintance of Miss Holliday's has a claim upon the interest of her friends.

MERRITT—(*Stiffly.*) Thank you.

Reënter Virginia with Duquet.

SCENE V

VIRGINIA—Mr. Duquet, Essie. (*Starts on perceiving Merritt, and acknowledges his presence with a bare inclination of her head.*)

DUQUET—(*Advancing with a sheepish air, holding in one hand a bouquet of violets tied with purple ribbons.*) I saw these violets in a floral shop on my way down town and I thought you might like them. (*With a deprecatory smile, proffers the violets.*) So near Easter, you know.

ORESSA—(*With agitation.*) They are very acceptable.

DUQUET—(*Perceiving Leavenworth.*) Why, Levvy, old man, you here?

LEAVENWORTH—(*With a sheepish smile and a voice of assumed carelessness.*) Just dropped in informally, you know.

DUQUET—Of course, of course. Well, I must be going.

ORESSA—(*In a clear, distinct voice.*) I have asked Mr. Leavenworth to remain a little while, and I extend the same invitation to you. As I informed him,

there is an old-time acquaintance here who, having heard of my good fortune, has sought me out. Mr. Duquet, I make known to you Mr. Merritt.

DUQUET—(*Shaking hands with Merritt.*) It is a pleasure, suh, to meet you. A person who has known Miss Holliday at any period of her life may count himself rarely privileged, suh.

MERRITT—(*To Oressa, with a short laugh.*) These must be some of your new friends, coming in the wake of your lucky strike. You are holding a reception, I take it.

ORESSA—The coincidence of these calls is utterly unexpected and yet opportune, for it relieves my mind of a weight of responsibility that has long held me in suspense, and clears the way for the uncovering of a secret that in my cowardice I had intended keeping hidden.

(*Merritt looks about with a puzzled expression.*)

ORESSA—I had contemplated entering upon a course of fraud, lying and deceit and the repudiation of what is innocent and helpless, to gain a temporary security and a counterfeit happiness.

(*Leavenworth and Duquet exchange wondering glances.*)

ORESSA—If it had not been for the fact of these three calls coming thus fortuitously together, I fear I should have pursued this course of dishonesty that would have led me I know not where. But this man (*Pointing to Merritt*), whom I may rightly call my god of retribution, has left me no alternative other than to disclose the truth.

VIRGINIA—(*In a warning voice.*) Oressa!

MERRITT—I am not forcing anybody to disclose anything.

ORESSA—Because you think the time is not ripe. But there is no desperation akin to that of feeling oneself snared within a power that is remorseless as odious. The doubt, the uncertainty of not knowing when the Damoclean sword will fall is more than the stoutest nerves can bear. So I am resolved to let you do your worst now. (*A dead silence intervenes. The atmosphere is charged with tense expectancy.*)

ORESSA—(*With a sweeping gesture toward Leavenworth and Duquet.*) Both these men are my declared lovers. (*Leavenworth and Duquet start and look at one another.*)

ORESSA—Both are square, upstanding men, and the offer of hand and heart by either of them any woman would look upon as an honor. To win the love of one of these men, I have been ready to perjure myself, deny my own blood! For the sake of just one year of happiness to be spent with him, I would willingly forego my cherished ambitions, renounce my prospects of high service and of eminence, and surrender all that the future might hold for me of possible triumph and glory! More, I would yield up my whole existence without a murmur! What is a young girl's immature love to a passion so mighty, so all-conquering as this that reaches to the deepest fibers of life, absorbs and possesses the entire being? I have confessed to the truth, I am proud of it, I exult in it! And now, out with what you have to say!

MERRITT—I have only to say to your friends what I have been saying to you the past hour. I confess

to have treated you badly, but I have come back to make it right. What can any man do more than to show his willingness to repair a wrong?

VIRGINIA—Essie shall not be allowed to longer shield me at the expense of herself or take the burden of my misfortune upon her shoulders. This man was *my* lover, not hers. He treated me shamefully, abandoned me!

(*Leavenworth and Duquet exchange bewildered glances.*)

MERRITT—What are you talking about? I your lover! Are you crazy? (*Contemptuously.*) What would any man want of *you?*

ORESSA—(*To Virginia.*) Unselfish spirit, best of loyal women, devoted of sisters! You shall not be allowed to falsely accuse yourself, to defile your spotless character with a taint in order to save me in the regard of these men, even if their good opinion is so precious as to seem in my eyes to transcend life itself! Your sacrifice would be futile, for the facts are of such a nature as to defy being held down. (*To Leavenworth and Duquet.*) You are going to know what I have tried in my short-sighted judgment to keep concealed. I shall unshroud the entire miserable affair of my past. This man was the husband of my dearest friend, and so I came to know him when he was courting her. Later she died, he brought her body to her mother's home. Naturally enough, I was there to render what assistance lay in my power. He turned to me. It was not a difficult thing for him to win the affections of an inexperienced girl. I had known so few men and never had had a lover. Under promise

of marriage, he ingratiated himself in my confidence. I trusted him implicitly. Later, when the date of our wedding was about agreed upon, without giving me the least premonition of his intent, he cast me aside and married another woman, of whose very existence I had been kept in ignorance. . . . I was left in the most pitiful of plights. I dared not remain home and face my father's wrath, my mother's tears and upbraidings. I had no other alternative than to take flight. Almost penniless without friends, I fled to this city to lose myself in the great vortex.

DUQUET—(*In a voice of thrilling anguish.*) Oressa! (*With a wild gesture, he puts both hands to his forehead, and then, bending his head, covers his face with them. Leavenworth straightens himself in his chair as a man turned to steel.*)

ORESSA—(*As one repeating a lesson.*) I worked up to the very day that my little one came. As soon as I gathered strength enough to leave my bed, I went to my toil again. I found through advertisement that I could get her into the home of an humble family living in the country. I worked at anything and everything I could find to my hand that would furnish the funds for her care and my own support. It was toil unceasing, but it was that or pauperism for us both, and I couldn't abide the thought of having my baby put in some asylum and lost forever to me. By strictest hoarding of my pennies, by the suffering of most cruel privations, I was enabled once a month to go and see her. Nights and Sundays I wrote until my exhausted brain refused to give forth any more ideas. My health suffered under the strain and broke

at last. On the verge of utter collapse, with only a few cents remaining between me and starvation, I had recourse in my last extremity to one who once had bidden me in the event of my need to apply to him. The rest of my story is familiar enough; it is history made by yourselves. This I want to say: if I had not known from actual experience, I would not have believed such compassion, such generosity, such humanity, existed on this footstool as that which was evidenced in your every act toward me!

LEAVENWORTH—(*To Merritt.*) Do you mean us to understand that there is a man on this earth so base, that after this forlorn girl, flung into the ditch, has succeeded by desperate efforts in crawling out of it, can nerve himself up to the unspeakable meanness of trying to pluck her down again? You contemptible cur! (*Springs to his feet, makes a lightning rush and precipitates himself upon Merritt. They grapple, wrestling furiously. Contending with wild energy, they are driven by the impetuous momentum around the room. Leavenworth is enabled now and then to land blows on Merritt's head and face, and at last half-stunning him with an assault below the belt succeeds in overmastering him and flings him out of the door, banging it shut on him.*)

LEAVENWORTH—(*Gasping hard.*) A good piece of work accomplished. 'Tis a thrashing well merited and long overdue. My God, that such monsters are allowed to live and move in the light of day among men! (*Takes up his hat.*)

Scene VI

Oressa—(*In a pleading voice.*) I have made a full confession of my case, and now I ask for your verdict. (*Leavenworth pauses, averting his gaze from her.*)

Oressa—I know how utterly unprincipled it was in me to try to impose myself upon you under false assumptions. No one knows as she who has committed it, the enormity of a sin like mine, but I have repented it in anguish and shame of spirit, I have repented it in bodily discomforts and miseries untold, over and over again. The only extenuation I can offer for it was the lack in my girlhood life of outside interest, of social companionship, my ignorance of the fundamental laws that underlie the relations of men and women. Can't you, then, put some charitable construction on my conduct and find it in your hearts perhaps even to forgive me? (*Looks from one to the other. Leavenworth refrains from meeting her gaze; Duquet keeps his face hidden.*)

Oressa—(*With supplication.*) Can't you speak one word of kindness? (*She waits. In a tragic voice.*) Is there not anything, then, that a woman can do through atonement, reform, through valuable service, through great achievement, that can blot out her one offense against the social order?

The world is harsh and unrelenting, often through its contracted vision, its limitation of comprehension. It is otherwise with you; emancipated of mind, catholic of spirit, and wide in your scope of view, liberal of

judgment, in your strength and wisdom you understand, and are thus compassionate to the frailties of the weak. (*In sweet entreaty.*) You who love me, I beseech to be merciful to my shortcomings. You who love me, are quick in your sympathies, responsive to appeal, and I beseech you to spare me! You, Armand, are generous and in the presence of suffering are not wont to remain unmoved. You, Carroll, I made no difficulty in forgiving. I was only too ready to pass over your youthful transgression. And I have paid in full, indeed, indeed, I have paid! (*In a stricken voice.*) Not one word?

I have drawn the curtain aside from my inmost woman's soul and it is unavailing! I have plead as one whose life is at stake pleads before the judgment bar, and it is unavailing! (*Virginia goes and puts her arm around Oressa. Slowly and in silence they move to the door, open and close it after them.*)

Curtain.

ACT IV

Living-room in Holliday house.

Setting as in Act I.

TIME—*Evening in May, two months later.*

Holliday is reclining back in a rocking-chair in his stocking-feet.

Enter Mrs. Holliday, attired in a modish gown of soft silk with lace at throat and wrists.

SCENE I

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Everything is ready. I measured the tea in the tea-pot convenient to put drawing as soon as they come, and I laid out a cold lunch on the table with some sauce and bread and sliced meat and cheese, knowing they would be tired and hungry after a whole day's journey on the train. (*Draws a deep sigh of weariness and sinks into a chair.*)

HOLLIDAY—They ought to be here pretty soon, now. I hope you remembered to turn down the gas in the dining-room?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You needn't worry about it, for I am not likely to forget. When have I ever wasted anything in this house? I should like to see you find any one else who would be more economical in ex-

penditures than I have been for the last forty-odd years!

HOLLIDAY—(*Mildly.*) There is no need of going into an argument when I simply meant to call your attention to it.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Huh! I ought to quit here and just let you have a taste of hired help for a while, with their extravagance and indifference and the kitchen full of fellows, and I guess you'd be mighty glad to get me back and not find so much fault either. . . . Why, pa, are you in your stocking-feet? I should think, when you haven't seen your daughter in over three and a half years you would have pride enough to put on your shoes! You might do her the credit to appear decent. I wonder what other man of your position in life would go around in so slumpy a way!

HOLLIDAY—Well, they haven't got such bad feet as mine,—corns and bunions and everything else to hurt. It is a pity in my own house I can't rest 'em a little.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You don't try to keep up, Benn. You just allow yourself to sink into old man ways. I would rather you wore those shuffling slippers than none at all. (*Reaches under the table and unearths a pair of worn slippers.*) Here, put these on.

(*Holliday, emitting a groan of resignation, draws on the slippers.*)

MRS. HOLLIDAY—There, that's better. Remember, the girls are used to city men and the contrast will be very marked when they see their father so slovenly.

HOLLIDAY—I guess they are used to their father.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Let them think you have spunked

up a little during their absence. . . . There is one thing I have made my mind up to, and that is to show a proper displeasure at Oressa's treatment of us in order to bring her to a full realization of what she has done in disregarding her duty to her parents.

HOLLIDAY—I guess you have already brought her to that, for after her letter of two months ago, in which she asked forgiveness for her neglect and permission to come and see us once more, and you answered back what you did and were so lukewarm in extending your hospitality, she was evidently discouraged, for she never wrote again and we didn't hear from either of them until Virginia's letter of yesterday, saying they would be here to-night.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I did perfectly right in resenting such neglect as any self-respecting parent would do! The idea of a girl running away from home, even if she thought she had provocation from her father and mother, and never coming back for three and a half years, to say nothing of not writing a word to let us even know whether she were dead or alive for nearly three years! It betrays a lack in her of right feeling!

HOLLIDAY—(*Clearing his throat.*) Hum, hum!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It put us in such an embarrassing position, for if any one asked *how* she was or *where* she was, how could we answer except to evade or tell a downright falsehood if cornered, when we hadn't the slightest idea ourselves? I have read of such conduct in slap-dash people without any sense of decency, but I never actually knew of such a case in any well-regulated family.

HOLLIDAY—You mustn't be too exacting.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*With withering contempt.*) Puh! Exacting! I know what's owing to us, if you haven't pride enough to expect anything from your children. I don't care if she was disappointed in that sneak of a Merritt. I always distrusted that man and his soft-spoken ways. But was that any reason for her to turn on those who brought her up and to whom she owed some gratitude? It was the height of impropriety for a young girl to go and live alone in a great city like New York. It put her in a wrong light. What do you suppose people said?

HOLLIDAY—She had no time to waste on what they said. If her description in her letter, guarded as it was, told anything, she was up against it so good and hard that she had about all she could do to keep body and soul together. I could read between the lines, if you couldn't, and the hardships she suffered in those three years put those we endured in the easy class. That she could go on and do what she did, under such difficulties, showed true grit and pluck. I didn't know it was in her. How she ever managed in such deep waters to keep from sinking outright is a mystery to me.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Tossing her head.*) She wasn't called on to place herself in a position where she had to bear privations. She had a home, even if it was poor, and she was welcome to stay in it. And since she has come before the public she has gone on living in the same unprotected way. Don't you suppose it aroused comment for a young woman under thirty years old to keep up an establishment and receive company without some elderly and discreet person to take the curse off? She must have been awfully talked

about.

HOLLIDAY—You are always so worried about how things look to people and what they are going to say. She had her sister to chaperone her.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—She sent for Virginia only a few months ago. Before that, who knew if she had any one at all? She laid herself open to misunderstanding. Of course I know a girl brought up under such careful moral tutelage as I gave my daughters was in no danger of being tempted to anything wrong. Still, she might have received some insult that would have been very unpleasant. Oressa is certainly eligible now to make a fine match, but high-feeling young men are wary of girls who are not sheltered by conventional proprieties.

HOLLIDAY—(*Clearing his throat.*) Hum, hum!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—As a needed lesson and to strongly discountenance such free and easy Bohemian doings, she ought not to be received by us, for a time at least.

HOLLIDAY—(*With heat.*) Well, I guess she will be received by us! I won't have it said a daughter of mine was turned away from her father's house.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—She will come, of course. But I shall show my resentment of her want of duty to us.

HOLLIDAY—For heaven's sake forbear throwing it up in her face! There are more important things to lay at all of our doors than some petty fancied neglect!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You call a slight of three and a half years' standing a fancied neglect!

HOLLIDAY—You've been harping on her neglect of us for months past, until I'm sick to death of hearing of it and I tell you right here, once and for all, I don't

care a damn!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Benn Holliday! You needn't swear!

HOLLIDAY—It's enough to make a man swear to be so nagged!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I can't help noticing, Benn, that since you've been backsliding from the church you aren't half the man you used to be.

HOLLIDAY—Nonsense! I'm twice the man I used to be, for now I am doing my own thinking for myself!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Shaking her head.*) The church certainly acts as a restraint and you controlled yourself much better than you do now.

HOLLIDAY—As to that, I'm getting old and I haven't the power of self-control I once had! . . . The fact is, Beulah, we can't afford to turn the cold shoulder on Oressa; the loss would be more to us than to her, for she is the only one in our family who has been heard of in the outside world or is likely to be.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I have always been given to understand that you thought only your sons were the ones to be heard of in the outside world.

HOLLIDAY—I did once think so, and they will do credit to their education by making the most of it and playing their part worthily, and will be looked up to and respected. If a man really wants to push clear of the crowd now-a-days he has got to do more than merely do his work well, for everybody is supposed to do that or get snowed under in the competition. He has got to learn more about some one thing than other people know, and when he has learned it, utilize it to

better advantage than his rival is able to do. Then he gains a reputation for being somebody. But when a man, just out of sheer natural ability, can go ahead of all these plodding fellows bent on attaining higher merit in their special work, and make something new clean out of his head they had never even thought of, why, there's only one word to express that and you know what it is. And my boys weren't born with it.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Well, I declare, you seem to have pretty much changed your mind lately.

HOLLIDAY—(*Bridling.*) Can't a man have the privilege of changing his mind?

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I suppose he can. But you had so little faith in her when she was home here with us, trying to grope her way into the light, that you wouldn't put out a finger to help her.

HOLLIDAY—What's the good of reminding me of that? (*Reflectively.*) It beats me where *she* got it.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—What, her gift? Well, you know very well her gran'ma Durant wrote poetry of a religious sort, very lofty and devotional, and my sister Lorinda for years corresponded for a weekly and even once got an article accepted by *St. Nicholas*. It was on balloons, I distinctly remember. She hunted everywhere for information and posted herself thoroughly from the encyclopedia before she touched her pen to paper. They paid her ten dollars for it and after six months sent it back, saying they couldn't publish it, excellent though it was, for the reason they were so over-stocked with matter, enough for three or four years to come. Now that was an honor to be so highly appreciated by a magazine of such standard au-

thority. I have always firmly believed that if Lorinda had had any substantial foundation in literature she would have made a brilliant record in the world. Why, if my mother had lived in these days of higher education, she would have been head and foremost of all the female movements, she was that advanced in her notions. There is not the slightest doubt, Oressa got her ability in a straight line from her gran'ma Durant.

HOLLIDAY—Maybe you are satisfied to trace it back there.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Well, if I can't trace it from my side of the house, where in the world could I trace it from, I should like to know? (*With withering contempt.*) It certainly didn't come from your family, for I have yet to learn that any of the Hollidays amounted to much. Your son Harvey is always hunting down the Holliday genealogy, but he never has succeeded, that I have heard of, in scaring up anybody more distinguished than a weaver or a farmer until your time!

HOLLIDAY—They were industrious and respectable people, if they did lack the gumption to get very forward. They have been nine generations in this country and during that time not a one was ever in State's prison!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It takes snap and go to dare things sometimes that land you in State's prison!

HOLLIDAY—You can sneer. They were honest.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—I am not sneering. I am just pointing out to you the impossibility of Oressa getting any very remarkable powers from such a source. Her forbears from my side, however, were always prom-

inent people, merchants and traders. The Woodwards were of the pioneer stock in this country. My grandfather Woodward fought in the Revolution.

HOLLIDAY—I believe all that you say of their superiority, if hearing it over and over can impress conviction. And yet I am very doubtful if these ancestors of yours have any claims on Oressa. It looks to me genius is quite independent of inheritance as it is also of education.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Then it can't be natural!

HOLLIDAY—Well, let us take, for instance, a family of very ordinary people dwelling in England, none of whom had ever distinguished himself through ability in any way. At a certain stage in their obscure history, as a meteor bursts forth from a dark sky, one of that family discovered preëminent excellencies. And the world awoke to the fact that there had been born in it the most universal mind it had ever known, William Shakespeare! How do you explain that?

Another illustration out of the many we can use is that of a Scottish race of rustics. For generations these common peasants had lived and died in utter obscurity, when all at once there emerged from the plow a master poet to astonish Europe under the name of Robert Burns!

What do you know about that? It's puzzling to say the least. And how do you explain this that just the one in a family, brought up as are all the other members in a prosaic environment, sees in these surroundings poetry of the most ethereal kind? Why should he be the one alone to idealize these practical associations and find beauty and novelty where they

find only the ugliness and dulness of reality? I think there is a power outside heredity that has put some of itself in these persons.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Sighing.*) It is only one more of the enigmas in the great secret that holds us. What's the use worrying our poor brains trying to unravel any of them?

HOLLIDAY—When a man is getting to a place where the end is almost in sight, he can't help speculating on the mysteries that face him at every turn. Well, one thing I have observed, that since she has come into public notice, I am a more important man in this town than I used to be. A great deal more consideration is paid me.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You mean that offer of the Vice-Presidency of the Surety Bank? It was a nice mark of appreciation.

HOLLIDAY—Still I believe the honor was owing to her. Prominent men who never more than nodded or said howdy, stop now, shake hands and pass the time of day. Why here only yesterday, Mr. Blount, the President of the National Bank, inquired with much solicitude after the healths of all the family. They are very civil indeed.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—And why shouldn't they be civil? If you aren't about as good as any of those men, I should like to know the reason. Their pretensions are absurd. Indeed, none of their families would bear much looking into. Most of the aristocracy of this place has sprung from farms or little outlying villages.

HOLLIDAY—Well, you mustn't forget, they've got the little gold eagles, Beulah!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—We ought to have them, too.

HOLLIDAY—We've got something better, our money's out at high rate of interest. Our children are all doing well! We're coming, Beulah! We're coming!

Enter Virginia, followed shrinkingly by Oressa, who is dressed in black and carries a small hand-bag.

SCENE II

VIRGINIA—(*Coming forward.*) How are you, pa?

HOLLIDAY—(*Getting to his feet.*) Girls, you are welcome home.

VIRGINIA—(*Kissing him.*) Oh, it seems good to get back! (*Goes to her mother.*)

HOLLIDAY—(*To Oressa.*) Well, Essie! (*Extends his arms. In a voice of deep feeling.*) It's been many a month since your old father has seen you, little one. (*Voice quavers and breaks.*)

ORESSA—I meant to have come long ago, but you know now why I didn't. I hope you haven't laid up anything against me, pa?

HOLLIDAY—Laid up anything against you? No! (*Puts back her hair and regards her with a yearning look. Draws her to him and kisses her again. Clears his throat, snuffs and coughs in efforts at self-control.*)

ORESSA—(*Going to her mother.*) Here I am, mommy. (*Offers to kiss her.*)

MRS. HOLLIDAY—(*Returning the kiss without enthusiasm.*) So you did find time at last to come and see us.

ORESSA—(*In an expressionless voice.*) Yes.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—If you had waited another three and a half years you would, without doubt, have found us up in the church yard laid away for keeps.

ORESSA—(*With quivering lips.*) Oh, don't say that, mommy!

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It's only too likely. Your father and I are getting old people. You have been very naughty.

ORESSA—I have been naughty, mother. (*Slips a gold piece in her hand.*)

MRS. HOLLIDAY—What's this?

ORESSA—The loan I took from your purse, mommy, the night I went away.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—But this is a twenty-dollar gold piece, and you only took ten dollars.

ORESSA—It is the principal and the accrued interest of three and a half years. I intend to pay my debts.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You needn't pay your mother, childie. Well, come now into the dining-room. I have got a little supper waiting there for you. You must be hungry.

ORESSA—No; we got our supper on the diner.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You must have a hot cup of tea, even if you don't want anything more. When one is tired, I have always found a hot cup of tea will refresh as nothing else will. Take off your hat and come right along. (*Oressa obeys like a child.*)

I see you have a black dress.

VIRGINIA—(*Quickly.*) She thought it less conspicuous for traveling.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—It is, and young women don't want to attract attention on trains by gay clothes which

are the mark of vulgarity. Then, too, every girl ought to have a black dress for the sake of emergency.

VIRGINIA—(*Uneasily.*) Yes, of course.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Unexpected things are likely to happen without notice. . . . I always tried to impress on you girls the necessity of having one black dress apiece in your wardrobes. And it is so genteel! But Essie was opposed to black, I never could tell why, when it is so becoming to her fair skin. She thought it somber, I suppose, and young folks like colors.

ORESSA—I am opposed to it no longer. I find it of great consolation.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—You mean utility. Well, come, now. (*Oressa follows her.*)

Exeunt both.

HOLLIDAY—(*To Virginia.*) We have the chance to talk a little on this unfortunate matter, but first I admonish you to speak low. Her mother must be spared this knowledge.

VIRGINIA—(*Nodding her head.*) We understand. I told Essie it wouldn't do; it would crush mother's pride and embitter her remaining days, and that she owed her consideration and she must forbear.

HOLLIDAY—A wise decision. Your mother is one of the best women in the world, but she couldn't understand this and the brooding on it would poison her entire pleasure in the child's success.

VIRGINIA—As events have shaped things, it will not be necessary she ever knows the truth.

HOLLIDAY—Oressa is not like herself. She was always a girl of such high spirits.

VIRGINIA—Of mercurial spirits.

HOLLIDAY—Up and down, fluctuating from the heights to the depths. But now she seems so changed, so very quiet.

VIRGINIA—She is more than quiet, pa. She is apathetic, rarely showing interest in any event. For days she has been listless, scarcely saying anything, and sometimes sits a long while with her head bent, or if she is roused out of this state of dull insensibility, it is to cry at the least provocation.

HOLLIDAY—(*With agitation.*) How long has she been in this way?

VIRGINIA—About two months. When I first noticed it coming, I was so concerned I went at once to consult with doctors, and they said her vitality was low, her nerves shattered, being the after-effects of those three years of cumulative exertions and privations. They prescribed change and complete rest. We went at once to a retired place in the mountains, away from everybody we knew and where there was an utter absence of excitement or annoyance that might cause worry. We were marking time there without much apparent change for better or worse in her condition, when the child, who had been full of sparkling life and energy, all at once sickened with spinal meningitis. In a short time it was all over with the little thing. It was the finishing stroke for Oressa. She was hysterical, alternating with morbid lassitude almost approaching unconsciousness, and when these first symptoms wore away she sank into utter dejection. She has got it into her head that the child was taken from her as a punishment because she had tried to conceal its presence from her friends and its identity from

others. She repeats again and again it is a retribution for her wickedness in being ashamed of it and trying to keep it in the background. She lashes herself with reproaches, accuses herself with being cruel and unnatural.

HOLLIDAY—Poor girl, poor unfortunate girl!

VIRGINIA—There is no reason for such condemnation and bitter regrets, for in reality she was devoted to the little thing and made an idol of it. It was so dear and sweet and appealing in its bright and winning ways that I don't know who could have found the hardihood to withstand the innocent creature. It was touching to see how Oressa's very heart was bound up in it. She called it her treasure, her jewel of inestimable value, because, I suppose, it cost her such a price. I have seen her a thousand times catch it up and hug it to her breast as though she could never let it go again, and kiss it over and over with such passionate tenderness and look at it with eyes of such yearning affection as would melt your very soul. Whatever might have been her fault, she did not err from wanting in a sense of responsibility toward it. She went heroically through so much for its sake before it came and afterward to maintain it and herself.

The entire affair has been, from the very beginning, a tragedy, and I fear it is going to end in her utter undoing. It is more than pitiful, it is terrible to see a girl so brilliant, so mentally strong and resourceful, so brave in her self-reliance, sink into a state like this.

HOLLIDAY—We must do something to arouse her, to turn her mind into other channels.

VIRGINIA—If it is possible in the face of such a dis-

couraging situation where everything only serves to remind her of her grief. Only to-day, on the train, a young mother scarcely more than a girl herself, with a beautiful little girl was seated not far from us. The mother amused herself by playing with the little one, alternately holding it from her and drawing it to her with caresses whilst the child, bubbling over with vivacity, bounded up and down on the seat opposite, giving vent to her glee in peals of silvery laughter. Oressa's eyes dilated and grew dark. Her features began to work from a very convulsion of anguish, and, no longer able to endure the sight, she covered her face, whilst her bosom heaved with dry sobs. . . . I can no longer bear the responsibility alone and I brought her here as a last recourse, thinking perhaps you might be able to relieve me and help her.

Reënter Mrs. Holliday and Oressa.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Oressa wouldn't eat anything, and only sipped a little of the tea. You better go and try, Virginia. Here I have been to the trouble of fixing a nice lunch for you girls and you won't even touch it. That's the thanks I get for my pains.

VIRGINIA—(*Cheerfully.*) I will go now. I was just talking a little with pa.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Perhaps your father will be able to get Oressa to talk a little with him. It is pretty certain I can't get her to talk with me.

VIRGINIA—You don't understand, mother, dear. Essie isn't well. She has overdone herself.

MRS. HOLIDAY—That's strange! Why, I shouldn't think just writing a play would overstrain a person to any great extent!

VIRGINIA—It's what goes before writing the play.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—She shouldn't have exposed herself to so many difficulties when she had a home to stay in. For a girl to live three and a half years in New York unchaperoned, lays her open to misconception. The best conduct on her part would be misconstrued and set folks to talking.

ORESSA—(*With a bitter smile.*) When a girl is struggling for life, she isn't bothering herself much with what people are saying about her.

MRS. HOLLIDAY—Under any circumstances she should be careful of her reputation for that is all a girl has. I tell you a young lady can't carry herself too particular. (*Listening.*) Is that the bell?

VIRGINIA.—The man with our baggage, I suppose.

MRS. HOLLIDAY.—I will go and show him where to take it.

VIRGINIA.—Let me go with you, ma.

Exeunt Mrs. Holliday and Virginia.

HOLLIDAY—(*To Oressa and sighing deeply.*) It is wisdom on your part to keep from your mother the experience through which you have passed since you have been away, as also the last event of which I have just been informed by Virginia. Your mother is not the kind to take into your confidence in such matters.

ORESSA—Ah, father, if she had only been the kind to have tried in the impressionable years of my life to gain my confidence,—if she had only been the kind to have been indulgent in the wisdom of her great love and tenderness to my foolish little errors instead of exaggerating them into something short of a crime, discouraging my childish confessions by the severity of

her censures,—if she had only been the kind to have warned me of the pitfalls waiting to entrap the feet of every inexperienced girl,—this unhappy episode might have been spared us! But why should I blame her for her want of understanding of girlhood's needs when the cause comes from a lack in her nature? I should never have considered a moment the thought of informing even you if I had not been financially independent and therefore outside the need of enlisting your aid. So I wrote you the facts. I had come to realize I owed it to the child in common justice to have her existence acknowledged by my family. The blame of her coming into this world was wholly mine; guiltless, she had a right to life and the opportunities pertaining to it. For the reason I had deprived her of an honorable name, her claim to recognition was the more imperative. Since her taking away I look on this matter with open eyes. I have come to see that of all the functions of womanhood that of maternity is the most sacred as the most important. It is Nature's impelling law that every woman, regardless of condition, consciously or subconsciously shall yearn to fulfil that function. Her love for man passionate and all absorbing though it be, in the last analysis is the love of the potential child! Why, then, should I be ashamed because through ignorance I failed to resist this mighty law merely because it is eternally at variance with the dictums of an artificial social system! I am not seeking to exculpate myself, I am only telling you that my child is holy in the sight of the Creator of all things, whatever conventional life that is adapted to serve the purposes of expediency, might make her.

HOLLIDAY—You are a very advanced woman, and you hold peculiar ideas that wouldn't be endorsed by the common run of people.

ORESSA—I see things as they are in very truth; the common run see only the semblance of things as they are permitted to see them by sanctioned usage and authority.

HOLLIDAY—You cannot produce any principle to uphold conduct that is subversive of moral law.

ORESSA—Not when that conduct imperils its security. Whosoever opposes that law must suffer the consequences. And who is strong enough to defy it and not be ground to atoms between the upper and nether millstones? (*Bends her head.*)

Reënter Virginia with MacLachlan.

Exit Holliday by one door as MacLachlan enters by the other.

SCENE III

VIRGINIA—Mr. MacLachlan, Essie.

MACLACHLAN—I have had the deuce of a time hunting you, Miss Holliday. You vanished as suddenly and completely as though swallowed up by an earthquake. (*He shakes hands with Oressa who shows signs of nervous disturbance.*)

VIRGINIA—We went for rest to the mountains.

MACLACHLAN—Without leaving a word for the friends you thus abandoned.

VIRGINIA—We didn't anticipate that our absence would cause concern or leave you disconsolate.

MACLACHLAN—But it did. Duquet was like a

restless flame flitting hither and thither in search of you. I patrolled before your closed and darkened apartments until the cop on the beat suspicioning I had designs, dogged my steps and I just missed by the skin of my teeth being run in. Leavenworth was the only one among us who preserved any sort of equipoise or equanimity, and he received some measure of consolation at last at the hands of that little kitten Flossie Duquet to whom rumor now says he is engaged.

VIRGINIA—What, Leavenworth engaged to Flossie Duquet!

MACLACHLAN—Such surprising things as that are brought about by the freakish turns of the wheel of Fate.

VIRGINIA—He must be more than twenty years older than that child.

MACLACHLAN—But what's twenty years more or less when a chap is in love? He isn't bothering himself to compute arithmetic at such a time, I assure you.

VIRGINIA—There comes a time though, when arithmetic counts.

MACLACHLAN—And there comes a time when there is a reckoning all around for what we do. But who is disturbing himself about ultimates when he wants to do the things? Miss Oressa, I have a commission from Mr. Frohman for you to write him a new play to be tested out during the summer.

ORESSA—I cannot engage in it for performance is impossible. My mind is flat and stale, sterile of ideas and lacking in hope and incentive to inspire them.

VIRGINIA—She has been very ill.

ORESSA—I am burnt out. What is to become of me now that my invention has gone back on me? What is my prospect? Death is preferable to dragging out a barren and profitless existence when the beauty, the grace and the glory have fled from life and the high faculty of doing noble service in the world is lost. (*MacLachlan looks at her with grave concern.*)

VIRGINIA—You must not talk so, Essie.

ORESSA—(*To MacLachlan.*) How would you endure it if you felt the power which is your pride and your joy, so exuberant, so overflowing that like Schubert's melody it poured itself out in an inexhaustible stream, and that in your fatuous over-confidence you deemed unfailing, all at once weaken and then desert you altogether? How would you endure the knowledge that it would not return, that you would never be able to write another line? To be eternally haunted by the desire to create, and to feel at the same time utter impotency to concentrate on ideas, or to frame a single situation, oh, it is horrible!

MACLACHLAN—You are under the shadow of a temporary despondency. What you need is a new point of view. You want a complete change of locality where you have never been. Suppose I suggest something. How does a trip to the Pacific Coast look to you?

ORESSA—In my state of health I could not undertake it now.

MACLACHLAN—But I do not propose that you undertake it alone. Let me accompany you and have charge of it.

ORESSA—Oh, I couldn't allow you to do me such a service!

MACLACHLAN—Even if it were a pleasure for me to devote myself to such a service and you gave me license so to do by going as my wife?

ORESSA—Your offer is more than kind. It springs from the pity in your generous heart for my forlorn state and I appreciate the honor you do me in asking me to be your wife, but love and marriage are not for me.

MACLACHLAN—Oh, don't come to so hasty a conclusion. Even if a girl has suffered a disappointment some time or other in her life and found out one man to be a mean-conditioned beast it doesn't necessarily follow that the entire bunch are rascals. She mustn't get it into her little head that there isn't some other chap decent and true, who is waiting around the corner to hand her out her full meed of happiness!

ORESSA—I have committed an act that excludes me from girlhood's sweet prerogative of love.

MACLACHLAN—You are a female John Bunyan.

ORESSA—A most unworthy one.

MACLACHLAN—I am a rough chap, Miss Holliday, and I shall probably bungle and not express with delicacy on the moment what I mean. But I want to say that there is a force of circumstances bearing down on a woman's life as well as on that of a man that sometimes proves so all powerful as to overwhelm her. Because she has once been submerged is she to be deprived of the courage to rise again? Because she has once made a false move in the game is she to forfeit all chances of redeeming that mistake and be com-

pelled to renounce her right to what is fair and wholesome and honorable? I think not. I believe that we all have more than one throw of the dice in the big gamble. So buck up!

ORESSA—But an incident has occurred in my life that makes me in the eyes of men of pride and honor ineligible to accept an unblemished name.

MACLACHLAN—If you have reference to that experience that occurred in your life before any of us knew you, then I say I both can and do forgive it.

ORESSA—(*With excitement.*) Then everybody knows about it and *they* have told you!

MACLACHLAN—Who are everybody? Who are they?

ORESSA—Why Leavenworth and Duquet, of course!

MACLACHLAN—They have not spoken to me of such a thing, I have known this from the beginning of your coming among us.

ORESSA—(*In amazement.*) I cannot understand how you learned it. Who told you?

MACLACHLAN—I will tell you how I learned it, and I will tell you who told me——

ORESSA—Sh-sh! Speak low! My mother——

MACLACHLAN—(*In astonishment.*) Have you then, not told her?

ORESSA—(*With a wan smile.*) A girl's mother is the last one to whom she is encouraged to confide a trouble like mine.

MACLACHLAN—I will be discreet as to this matter. It was very simple. You had your baby cared for by a poor and respectable family in the country. Now it so happened that the son of that family became my

chauffeur. He had of course heard of you and knew in full about your transaction with his people. Though he had kept himself out of your sight, being diffident and hulking, he nevertheless had not lost any opportunities of seeing you on your periodical visits. Now he had often nursed and as it grew older played with your little one. When he began to drive me to your New York apartments and afterward took us on several occasions out automobiling together, he naturally was struck by the resemblance you bore to the girl he had seen at his country home. Puzzled by the disguise of your expensive finery and the prosperous mode of your life, his curiosity was whetted. He made inquiries of course as to your identity and to his astonishment learned that the Miss Holliday of literary prominence was none other than the little Mrs. Holliday who had posed as a widow to his mother and sisters. He did not lose much time in acquainting me with his wonderful discovery. I told him that if he ever breathed a syllable of it to any one else I would smash his face to a pulp, and in addition fling him neck and heels out of my employ!

ORESSA—And you knew this right along and kept your counsel!

MACLACHLAN—Why shouldn't I keep it? What do you take me for—an utter cad? Good heavens, I had thought I could lay claim to some pretensions to being a gentleman!

ORESSA—How you must have despised me for practising such deceit on you all!

MACLACHLAN—Instead I admired your self-control and aplomb. My curiosity was piqued to see how you

would carry it through. Now let us put this aside. (*Goes over to her chair and looks down in her upraised eyes. In a voice of deep feeling.*) Please believe me that I want to help you, little woman.

ORESSA—I do, and that you are of the large-souled men of this earth! But I repeat love is not for me.

MACLACHLAN—(*Smiling.*) I am not conceited enough to delude myself with the hope that your particular little god has incarnated himself in my shaggy person. It would be a preposterous expectation that a girl of your sensitive feeling and fastidious taste would of her own accord, unsolicited, care for a big rough Scotsman like me. But only give me a show and I am confident that if the perseverance of patience and devotion can accomplish anything, I can win out at last against the odds.

ORESSA—It is out of the question. I cannot consider it.

MACLACHLAN—Not so. There is more than one way of looking at a proposition and one's decision should be shaped through the best point of view. Sentiment is not always to be considered absolutely foremost in the matter of a union when it can be offset by respect and pure regard. There are alliances entered into, Miss Holliday, from a connection of mutual interests and advantage, from motives of noble expediency, of highest desirability to both parties. You are in a position of rare delicacy at a critical stand in your life. Because of your youth, your personal beauty, your brilliant endowments, your conspicuous place, you are laid open, as few women are, to temptation and injury, to public notice and assault. You must have

protection, a shield to preserve you from the world's annoyances, to defend you from its attacks. I am offering myself as your guard and your security.

ORESSA—(*Shaking her head.*) I will have no need of protection henceforth. I have withdrawn from the arena not to return again. I shall soon be forgotten, the little I have achieved swallowed up in the greater deeds of others.

MACLACHLAN—Your career is too eminent to surrender to obscurity at the caprice of a temporary discouragement. You have toiled too hard to attain your goal! You are a woman of too much practical sense to let one episode in your past ruin your future possibilities. Your ambition is too genuine to be absorbed in vain regrets, your genius is too precious to be sacrificed to private feelings. That is weak and selfish. What if you have had a mischance! Why, we rate men not by the faults they commit, but by the value of the service they are enabled to perform! We estimate our great men not by their moral delinquencies, but by the magnitude of their achievements! There are too few on this earth of the really gifted and original that we can afford the loss of even the least of them. Think of yourself first as belonging to the world.

ORESSA—I think of myself first and last as a woman only, with all a woman's frailties and foibles and contradictions and passionate yearnings for love and domestic happiness. What is fame, cold and glittering, to the softly luminous jewel that adorns the crown of womanhood—maternal joy? What are all the acclamations of the crowd to the little voice of childish satisfaction and delight? Do the fickle praise and

homage of the public take the place of the tiny arms around your neck, the touch of pure lips on your cheek? I knew these blessings and valued them not until too late. And they will not come to me more. (*Begins to moan feebly.*)

VIRGINIA—(*Aside to MacLachlan.*) She lost the little one.

MACLACHLAN—Ah, I begin to see!

ORESSA—The trouble with me, Mr. MacLachlan, is that my heart is broken. And it is not within your power to make it whole again.

MACLACHLAN—(*Aside to Virginia.*) I am going to stay a few days in this town and to-morrow morning I will look in on you early. I consider her condition to be at a critical juncture and if something is not brought about soon to turn the tide of her thoughts from this gloomy brooding on her misfortune, I fear the worst. These passionate natures that feel with such intensity, suffer the pangs of death in their afflictions as they rise to the highest heaven in their joys.

Exit MacLachlan.

VIRGINIA—That is the noblest Roman of them all.

ORESSA—He is offering himself to me out of sheer pity.

VIRGINIA—He is offering himself to you because of his high regard and admiration for your qualities and because he believes he can be of real use to you. He will make you a sterling husband. His is a great heart full of sympathy, compassion and forbearance to the shortcomings of others. He understood and forgave you at once, indeed never thought hardly of you, when

those who professed such ardent love at the first test you put it to, deserted you.

ORESSA—The first proved the supreme test.

VIRGINIA—They were not sincere in their loyalty or they would have remained stanch.

ORESSA—They will not enter our lives any more.

VIRGINIA—(*Listening.*) That sounds like ma's voice calling me. I must go back and help her about the unpacking. We are going to put your things in your room. You will sleep to-night in your own little bed. (*Kisses her tenderly.*)

ORESSA—I am going to rest a little now.

VIRGINIA—That's right. Be good to yourself, kid. (*Pats her shoulder.*)

Exit Virginia.

SCENE IV

(*Oressa rises slowly, her gaze on the door through which Virginia has passed, and then her eyes furtively rove over the room.*)

ORESSA—It's odd but it seems to me lately night or day I almost never find myself alone. Does she suspicion me, or is it just an excess of her sisterly devotion because I am ill? She is always either with me or, if she leaves me remains so close at hand that on some pretext or other, she is soon back again. I wonder how long I shall be left to myself now?

(*She goes with swift panther movements over to where she has placed her satchel and brings it to the table.*)

ORESSA—Things have turned out other than I anticipated and wanted them to do, but at least the com-

pensation is mine. I have lived life and I know life; I have even had my little day of triumph however brief. So what right have I to expect anything further? My life might have contained more satisfactions with some abiding happiness however small, but with my ambitions and my endeavors it matters not any longer.

(*Looks furtively all around, takes a key from the silver mesh bag on her wrist, opens the satchel and puts her hand in it.*)

ORESSA—Strange, but I never felt more self-possessed. I believe the stirrings of a strong curiosity are uppermost.

Will the vast curtain of the Universe that shrouds in its impenetrable folds and shuts from our sight the workings of the mighty hand, be drawn aside? Will the sublime mystery of the myriad suns whose light glimmering faintly in the remote abysses of the boundless vault has taken thousands of years to reach our view, be revealed at last?

Will the baffling enigma of life and death be unraveled, the inconceivable design be explained, the incomprehensible scheme be made clear, to whose solution philosophers, scientists and sages throughout the generations have devoted the powers of their search and inquiries! Or is man doomed never to know? With life are sense and knowledge severed, and with his last breath does he sink into the eternal sleep from which there is no more awakening? Or does he become merged into the great Consciousness losing in the illimitable gulf his personal knowledge and identity, whilst performing his infinitesimal part in the gigantic

operations! Perplexing and wonderful problem! Thrust without will or consent into a stupendous and obscure world, surrounded on every side by the impregnable walls of concealment, he runs his brief span and those who knew him know him no more, for he has passed into

"The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveler returns."

(*Brings forth her hand from the depths of the satchel and there gleams in it a short thick revolver. Regards it curiously.*)

ORESSA—So little and so all potent! Apparently so insignificant and yet so ominous, the fateful instrument that in the space of a second will cause the old accustomed boundaries to fade into oblivion and usher in, mayhap, an unfamiliar panorama whose unfolding marvels the earthly imagination is powerless to conceive.

Enter Duquet unperceived by Oressa, whose eyes are bent on the revolver. With silent lightning bounds he reaches her side.

(*Oressa's lips move. Duquet's hand clutches the revolver. She raises her head and her eyes with a wild glance, meet his.*)

DUQUET—A dangerous plaything!

ORESSA—(*Gasping.*) You! WHO sent you! (*Recoils uttering a terrified cry.*)

DUQUET—What mad thing are you doing?

ORESSA—(*With a distorted smile.*) Sane thing! I know full well what I am doing. I never felt more self-possessed in my life!

(*She is seized by a violent spasm that shivers her from head to foot. With weakening limbs she totters*

to a chair and sinks in it.)

Reënter Virginia

(*Duquet raises his hand with an imperious gesture enjoining silence. He stands in a fixed attitude his concentrated regard on Oressa.*)

Oressa—(*Covering her eyes with her quivering hands and still shaken by the force of the uncontrollable convulsion.*) Is this, too, a dream like the others through which he phantom like is always flitting, sometimes luring me with his tender smile, more often repelling me with his frowning gaze of accusation? Or is it really he come back in very truth? No, no! impossible! for he lacked further concern in my fortunes, he showed himself to have neither sympathy nor clemency for me in my trouble! Did he not at the revelation of my fault recoil from me in utter aversion and horror? He will never overlook it on this earth or soften in his severity to me. Perhaps in the other world he may understand and forgive me when he knows how I loved him!

Virginia—Essie!

(*Oressa raises her head and stares with wide startled eyes as one too suddenly awakened.*)

Oressa—(*In bewildered tones.*) Who spoke to me just now? Was it a voice in my brain? Or was it Armand's ghost?

Virginia—(*Tenderly.*) It is I, your sister, Virginia. (*Goes to her and takes her hand.*)

Oressa—Virgie. Where am I? Oh, yes, I remember now, I'm home again! (*Groans and moves her head restlessly from side to side.*) But what matters where I am when the haunting memories are always

torturing me here? (*Puts her hand to her forehead.*) Who was it interfered?

DUQUET—(*Coming forward.*) It was I. I come to ask your forgiveness, Oressa.

ORESSA—Why must you prevent me seeking peace? When hope is at an end, the avenues of usefulness closed, when there is nothing left in the way of achievement or joy, do you not find in your creed justification for seeking release? Then why must you bring me back to my misery? But then, that other day you were unsparing, remorseless, unmoved by my supplications. Your love proved but a flimsy thing that took wings at the first trial. If it had been as you professed it, deep and abiding, it would have survived any shock, even the crushing force of the shock of my confession.

DUQUET—(*Earnestly.*) And it did. As soon as I had rallied from the suddenness of the blow I awoke to the consciousness of your situation and the extenuating circumstances conditioning your fault. I went back the very next afternoon following that scene to tell you how I regretted my want of response to your appeal. Your apartments were closed, the curtains drawn, you had fled the place leaving no word for any one. I tried to trace you. I became a typical Wandering Jew in my uneasy flittings to and fro. I believe now that my wretchedness of soul by the miracle of telepathy communicated itself to your subconsciousness and was reflected in your dreams! I wrote you letter after letter which were returned address unknown. And when my efforts proved unavailing as a last resort I came here to let you know how sorry I am for my failure that day to act in instant sympathy with you, and how fully I

commiserate your misfortune. (*Still trembling Oressa rises slowly from her chair and looks at him with a repellent expression. Gradually her breast fills with a deep inhalation and her form expands and becomes erect.*)

ORESSA—(*In a voice of finality.*) It is too late!

DUQUET—(*Gently.*) Not so. You are not going, at this supreme crisis when standing at the parting of the ways of life so close to the brink of eternity that its shadow envelopes you, to nourish as your last thought resentment toward one who loves you as he loves naught else here below. You are going to break down this wall of hostility between you and me and give me an opportunity to set myself right with you. Will you not sit down, dear heart, and do me the justice to listen to what I have to say to you? (*Presses her back in her chair.*)

ORESSA—What explanations can you devise to account for your insensibility to my distress that day, what regrets can you feign for your inexorable impassivity in the presence of my agony of mind and heart? Do you know, Armand Duquet, that it was then and there that I learned that the feeling you professed for me was not genuine, for love is kind, long suffering, patiently forbearing to the weaknesses and follies of its object and remains in the presence of the greatest offenses,—even crime itself,—undaunted! As in a flash of lightning your true character was illumined, and I saw you to be narrow in your sympathies, rigid in your judgments and relentless to moral failings.

DUQUET—(*Bending on one knee at her side.*) Do

not pass a sentence on me so unjust! Will you continue to think that I am harsh, that I am illiberal, that I am relentless, when I tell you that the tyranny of this love I bear you has proved a very curse, the despoiler of my repose of soul, the ruin of my productivity, that I haven't written a line of original work since that day! (*Oressa rises and takes a staggering step from him.*)

Oressa—I am ill. I am in no condition to argue this. Have mercy on my weakness if nothing else.

Duquet—(*Restraining her.*) You are not a figure of marble! You are a woman, Oressa, full of passion and tenderness, suceptible to affection, ready to forgive!

Oressa—Let me go!

Duquet—(*Holding her by the shoulders.*) If you had ever entertained for me any feeling of real esteem, gratitude or otherwise, you would not find the fortitude to steel your heart against me to-night when I plead for a hearing. Was it, then, folly for me to have deluded myself with the hope that you might have grown to cherish a deeper sentiment for me than a purely perfunctory regard? It must have been, for have you not said love is kind, long suffering, patiently forbearing to the mistakes of its object, and does it not remain even with the provocation of affront and injury, firm, unshaken? (*With strong passion.*) Why! do you not know that I am ready to overlook anything and everything for your sake, to pass them over as though they had never been,—to fling away my career,—aye, to abandon those who are nearest to me in blood, and to follow your fortunes wherever they

may lead us even to the uttermost ends of this planet! And when I swear to you this, will you say that the feeling I professed for you was not genuine? Do you not know that for this love which you hold in your keeping, I am ready to barter my soul, renounce my hope of salvation—for what is that without you? (*In a thrilling voice.*) This fair globe is peopled with women beautiful and virtuous, but on it all there is only just the one girl for me!

ORESSA—(*With strong gestures.*) You would underrate my affection for you, even doubt its existence, when it was my expanding passion for you dominating my heart, overmastering my actions, that impelled me to the unnatural course of denying my own child! In order to win your love in return, which in my fatuous delusion I thought the highest consummation of human happiness, I kept her concealed out of sight of all eyes. Such madness of the mind made of me a base coward, a wicked mother, for I was fearful of the consequences if you knew the truth. But God punished me for my guilty conduct as I deserved, for the penalty He exacted of me was terrible. Like the bolt from Olympus that struck in Niobe's arms her remaining daughter, the blow descended and I was left shattered in health, deserted of friends, robbed of my last solace! (*Begins to weep.*)

DUQUET—And that is the reason for this black! My poor girl, my poor girl!

ORESSA—You, Armand, are the cause of this, for if it had not been for my wild infatuation for you, I should not have been ashamed of her. You proved yourself unworthy of such a sacrifice on my part and

it was my retribution you should. Oh, on all the face of the earth, is there a more desolate creature? Is there a single other deprived of a ray of hope to light her forlorn path? I have nothing to contemplate save saddest memories! . . . It was all a mistake from the first. What right had I to think of love and marriage, those blessings my sister women so innocently anticipate! Was it not boldest presumption on my part? So was I fitly rewarded! My experience had been so tragic, with only care and anxiety and toil. Don't you see how impossible it all is? Oh, why must you interfere when I had nerved myself to the one act that could bring release from this burden of wretchedness!

Exit Virginia softly.

DUQUET—Because we two by virtue of the divine grant that is so brief and rare a boon, have a claim upon happiness that transcends all else! We are in the flower of that youth, Oressa, that blooms once only in a life time and is as evanescent as it is fresh and fair and fragrant! Now is our day and our opportunity and not anything shall come between to take from us our benefice vouchsafed from On High! . . . There can be no such word as impossible in our calculations, for love has wiped it out altogether! Speak no more against your heart. Whatever your lips may utter, dear chile, the cry coming from your deepest nature over and over is for me to stay! (*Extending his arms.*) Come!

ORESSA—(*Weeping.*) When I abased myself in my confession of love, when I flung aside the veil of my very soul in my frantic prayer to you, you remained in-

flexible. I can never forget that abyss of humiliation in which you cast me! Through you I have suffered too much!

DUQUET—I know, I know! But this, precious one, is only the resentment of pride, and can that have any serious weight measured against the might of a love that we bear to one another that has withstood the most crucial test to which human affection can be subjected? You are not going to hold this paltry grievance against me! Ah, my dear, my love, mah honey! (*Folds her in his embrace.*)

ORESSA—(*Struggling.*) No, no, no!

DUQUET—Stay a moment and let me speak, dearest. There was a time back in the twilight of created things when the Maker of the Universe planned human life. In His omnipotent Mind was shaped a picture of men and women of all races and different colors moving in countless processions through the centuries. On this colossal canvas, belonging to an epoch far, far in the distant future, was the vision of a little maid who was to take material form and substance under the name of Oressa Holliday. As He had purposed special service for her to render to Him, the spirit that was to be incarnated in this little maid was rare, and strong, and beautiful, and by virtue of its being thus, was destined to triumph over birth and place. The character was to be fashioned noble and generous and impulsive with a touch of wilfulness. In this infinite omniscient Mind was spread forth all this little maid should think and do and become. He knew what was to be her environment, what were to be the peculiar circumstances hedging her about and that, possessing

this impulsive nature, He also in His prescience knew, she would yield to one temptation that should take her unawares. But in the infinite wisdom of this mighty all-seeing Mind that penetrated through eons of time with the knowledge that in this impulsive nature were locked great potentialities for good, He was aware that there must be forces of castigating adversity to develop them to their richest fruitage. For in His plan, human life was to be both imperfect and experimental and to realize itself only through its own efforts, working out its salvation through determined struggles with obstacles. He knew that from the ashes of her dead self this little maid, so finely endowed of soul, Phœnix-like would rise to the noblest heights and be all the stronger and better woman for her trials.

ORESSA—(*Wistfully.*) Do you think that God who knows and understands all, means me to be happy at last?

DUQUET—I not only think but am convinced of it, my darling, as I am convinced He has decreed from the beginning of time that we two shall belong to one another. (*Bends his head and presses his lips on hers.*)

ORESSA—Ah, Armand, I am so tired! If you knew what a weariness life has been to me these weeks!

DUQUET—It will be so no longer. Put aside your torturing self-reproaches with the entire past that has served its purposes and been lived out and enter upon the new future, taking the happiness He has intended for you. Do you know that before I leave this town I am going to become your husband?

ORESSA—(*With parted lips.*) My husband!

When?

DUQUET—To-morrow morning—early in the morning, and before noon we're off! Think of me to-night, love, as a hovering spirit guarding you through the silent hours and in the fresh morn taking material shape and wafting you hence as benignant genii bear those they love to enchanted realms.

ORESSA—How far hence?

DUQUET—(*Smiling.*) Oh, to the other side of this big America!

ORESSA—Your family—your sisters—your mother—will never be reconciled to me when they know the truth!

DUQUET—My mother knows it already and *is* reconciled. I went home and laid the entire matter before her, told her of your fault, and of your brave struggles alone and friendless in the city to overcome your misfortune. I did not hold back anything in my recital of your wrong and your heroism, and as she listened the tears filled her eyes. From her stainless life came understanding and in her purity of soul she found compassion. She is willing to receive you, nay more, to welcome you. She has written you a personal letter which I am going to give you. You can't have any idea of my mother,—of how beautiful is her character, how generous are her sympathies! There will be no trouble about my sisters, for you won little Flossie's heart that day she called upon you. She told me afterward how sweet and patient you were. And now no more objections. I have come for you, dear, and I will not be gainsaid.

ORESSA—You are too masterful!

DUQUET—(*Lifting her off her feet and crushing her against his breast.*) You are willing I be thus because you have chosen me for your lord. Is it not so? (*With winning grace.*) Won't you kiss me just once, sweetheart, in token of our betrothal, for you are my little fiancée this one eve only, you know. (*She kisses him.*) Ah, won't you grant one more to seal the compact you become my wife to-morrow?

ORESSA—But I haven't entered into any such compact. You are taking all this for granted. The time is too short.

DUQUET—It has been too long by far. I have loved you dating from that night I verily believe you came fainting to my shelter. And I am going to shelter you in these arms all the rest of your days.

Reënter Virginia.

ORESSA—(*In quivering accents of joy.*) Oh, Virgie, you don't know what a load of care and worry is lifted off my heart and what peace has descended upon it. You tell her, Armand! It is the most wonderful thing, it certainly must be magic!

DUQUET—(*Smiling.*) The magic of love, sister mine!

ORESSA—It seems like a beautiful dream!

DUQUET—A dream that shall last, God willing, whilst life remains. We have put everything behind us, sister Virginia, and are going to journey hand in hand along the pathway of life, following its fortunes, sharing its blessings and bearing its burdens together. (*With a smile he holds out his left hand and draws Virginia within his arm and kisses her.*)

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